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des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 21 March 2017

Mardi 21 mars 2017

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

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Todd Decker



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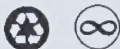
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 21 March 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 21 mars 2017

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 CONTRE LA TRAITE DE PERSONNES

Ms. Naidoo-Harris moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 96, An Act to enact the Human Trafficking Awareness Day Act, 2017 and the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act, 2017 / Projet de loi 96, Loi édictant la Loi de 2017 sur la Journée de sensibilisation à la traite de personnes et la Loi de 2017 sur la prévention de la traite de personnes et les recours en la matière.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Ottawa–Vanier. I am pleased to stand today to begin second reading debate on Bill 96, the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, 2017.

Speaker, I'm going to start with a news story. Last year, a preteen girl went missing. Four days later, thankfully, the child was reported found by police. You may or may not remember the story, but if you do, you might have thought it was a case of a child runaway. But behind the headline was another troubling story. This girl had not run away; she had been recruited online into the brutal, dangerous and hidden world of human sex trafficking right here in Ontario. Her story was unusual, but only because she was quickly released. The harsh reality is, most other victims are lost for years to the world of trafficking, to sexual exploitation or forced labour.

Many people don't understand what human trafficking is, but by textbook definition, it's the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people by improper means for an illegal purpose, including sexual exploitation and forced labour. It's important to understand that, but it's even more important to know that human trafficking is a horrifying crime against human rights. It's a form of human slavery that causes pain, despair and shame, and harms some of the most vulnerable young people in Ontario. And it can cause a lifetime of harm.

So let's talk about those people at risk of being trafficked: 70% of trafficking involves sexual exploitation,

and that targets our youth, young women, girls and boys, typically aged 14 to 22. Especially vulnerable are indigenous women and girls, youth in care and at-risk youth, individuals in the sex trade, and persons with mental health and addiction issues.

But while the majority of trafficking involves sex slavery, approximately 30% of trafficking is in labour, involving precarious workers, foreign nationals and newcomers. These are people who are usually in search of jobs, a better life, a dream, and they instead become trapped and exploited for another person's gain. They are stripped of their rights, their sense of identity, and their future. They're a commodity who is told what to do and where to go at the hands of their trafficker. They have lost their personal choice and freedom. They are threatened, isolated, intimidated and controlled.

Now, they may not know where they are and they may not see a way out. Just think about it: This is happening to our young people and vulnerable workers in ever-increasing numbers right here in Toronto, in the GTA and all across Ontario. These otherwise wonderful communities, also known as human trafficking hubs—Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Toronto, Windsor, London, and the so-called Golden Horseshoe—these hubs are linked to form a corridor where people are recruited and moved around, away from their familiar homes and communities. Far from home, without money or transportation or familiar surroundings, they lose their sense of place and their identity. They have nowhere to turn; no future, except a future possibly with their trafficker.

This province is a major centre for human trafficking in Canada. In Toronto alone, as of December 2016, 62 trafficking victims were found, 60% of whom are 16 years of age or younger. There were 77 arrests and 529 charges laid of trafficking or related crimes.

People are often surprised to hear about this. I know I certainly was. To even hear about this is an issue. People mistakenly think that most trafficking impacts women and girls brought in from other countries, or the precariously employed, and that still goes on and it must be stopped. But now we understand, as a government, that human trafficking has changed. It's growing. It's local. We have to do something about it.

I would like to pause here now just to thank the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment. Their hard work travelling the province raised our awareness of the extent of the problem involving vulnerable citizens of our own province. At the time, we were engaged in public consultations about the sexual violence plan, a plan we are so proud of, which is now recognized worldwide

for changing attitudes towards violence and which has just now had its two-year anniversary.

This is why consultation is so important with our communities, because when we as a province go out and consult, we are truly listening. What this committee heard repeatedly was an unexpected cry for help, stories about vulnerable Ontario girls who had left their communities and formed new and dangerous relationships with exploitive men. I'm going to talk more about how and why that happens in a moment.

First, I'd like to thank the people who came forward at that time—many of them are indigenous partners—and to acknowledge our Premier, who listened and said that human trafficking is happening and that we must find a way to fight this. I, of course, want to thank our member opposite, MPP Scott, for all of her hard work on this file, which really made sure that voices of many Ontario young women and girls were heard.

We've heard a lot since then about the complicated nature of human trafficking. It's hidden. It's secretive. Here's a typical story: A girl is online. She starts to form a relationship with a man who, it turns out, is methodically grooming her. Young, vulnerable and often lacking in self-esteem, she becomes convinced she's the centre of his world. Gifts follow, money, the promise of being loved and looked after.

Once lured inside this world, things change and they change quickly. The girl is stripped of her identification and belongings. Often, she is tattooed as common property, and then she is put to work in the sex trade.

Now dependent on a trafficker for drugs to numb her pain, for money and for imagined love, safety, and attention, she forms what is known as a trauma bond. That's very hard to break. It can be years before something or someone—a person, an ad or self-awareness—creates the need to seek a way out to survive. That's the picture and that's the scope of the problem. As a government, we are fighting this. We must fight it and we must do the right thing for young women, girls and those at risk.

I have gone into a lot of detail as Minister of the Status of Women because I and, of course, my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier, MPP Natalie Des Rosiers, want you to understand the nature of this crime and the reason we are debating the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, 2017, today.

0910

Bill 96 consists of two separate statutes and builds on commitments made in our government's strategy to end human trafficking, launched last June. If passed, this bill would help protect Ontarians from human trafficking in the first place, better assist survivors who escape human trafficking and are trying to rebuild their lives and it will mobilize much-needed awareness and public opinion to drive human trafficking from this province—something I know that all of us want to do.

Speaker, our government has zero tolerance for violence against women, girls and all Ontarians. Over several years we have now put in place important programs and initiatives that make personal safety and security for

all of us, especially the most vulnerable, our absolute priority.

Let's review some of the steps we have taken. We developed the Domestic Violence Action Plan as a comprehensive approach to preventing domestic violence. It has made a real and positive difference in the lives of abused women and children.

We released It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment, and it has launched important progress. There are now measurable changes in attitude on sexual violence and harassment in this province. In fact, I spoke to many women and girls just last night at the University of Guelph on an initiative that they were moving forward to, and much of the conversation at that university focused on the issue of sexual violence and harassment.

So, yes, we are making campuses and workplaces safer and more responsive to sexual violence and harassment complaints. We are increasing supports to survivors and we continue to confront the rape culture and misogyny that is at its core every single day. But we all recognize that our work is not done and that there's more work to do.

In addition, we are currently putting into action Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women. This long-term strategy is dedicated to addressing the root causes of violence against indigenous women, providing more effective justice and community services, and promoting wellness amongst indigenous peoples. We have created a number of strong goals that, when fulfilled, will change the lives of indigenous women and their families across Ontario.

Our zero-tolerance approach to violence has since been extended to include human trafficking, something that we know many of our indigenous women and girls are vulnerable and at risk for.

Last year, Premier Kathleen Wynne committed to creating a human trafficking strategy as part of Walking Together, and kept that promise with the release of the strategy to end human trafficking last summer. This strategy was developed after important and extensive consultation, and it includes a range of voices from survivors to front-line community agencies, indigenous organizations, and police and public safety representatives who have seen first-hand the tragedy of human trafficking. I would emphasize that these voices must continue to be heard.

Our government continues to seek the help and input of multiple partners even as we move forward. We want you to know that they are heard, and we are listening. I also want, at this time, to recognize and thank the Attorney General, the Minister of Community and Social Services, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and all of the other partner ministries across government for their hard work and important contributions. Human trafficking is absolutely a complex problem, and it required tremendous co-operation and understanding to both develop the strategy and carry out

its implementation. The approach must be done right in order to be effective, for survivors to have hope and for human traffickers to be held accountable and stopped.

Our strategy to end human trafficking has several critical components. It focuses on raising awareness and providing necessary supports for survivors on developing indigenous-led approaches and culturally relevant services to meet the distinct needs of indigenous communities and on improving identification, investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases.

In just a few short months, our government has taken action on it in several key ways. As a crucial first step, we focused on the very important aspect of coordination. We established the Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking Coordination Office to strengthen connections between law enforcement, justice, social services, health, education and child welfare. An effective fight against trafficking needs to be able to pull in ministerial expertise from across government, across sectors, and connect with a wide range of partners and organizations that battle against trafficking across the province every single day. The fight is real, and it's under way. Traffickers prey on the most vulnerable: young girls and boys, indigenous people, at-risk youth, youth in care, migrant workers, and people with mental health and addiction issues. Ministries and all our partners in this fight need to be able to share information and work together. It's crucial. It's the only way to prevent trafficking of individuals in the first place, to respond to incidents that do occur, and to develop best practices to help survivors heal from the horror of their experience. The provincial coordination office will also be monitoring and reporting on the effects of our government's human trafficking initiatives so that we can be sure they are having a positive impact. It has been difficult to collect hard data on this cold, hard crime, but having that information is a critical part of moving forward.

The fact is, human trafficking is hard to track. It's hard to track because it's not only hidden, it's actually highly mobile. Victims are often moved between towns and cities, moved from one apartment to the next, and moved between provinces. So just as we need to coordinate within Ontario, it is also important that the issue be addressed across Canada, because it does affect all jurisdictions. Remember, contrary to popular belief, human trafficking is not predominantly brought to this country from elsewhere. Fully two thirds of those who are trafficked are Canadian citizens or permanent residents. And I want to assure you that I have had conversations with my federal counterpart, the federal Minister of Status of Women, on this very issue.

Speaker, our strategy to end human trafficking also commits to training, and over the past several months we have taken action in this regard. To date, crown attorneys, police services and workplace health and safety inspectors have all received additional training on human trafficking that is specific to their areas of expertise and involvement. We are developing an online training program for front-line service providers who work with sur-

vivors. We also continue to work with community-based service partners to develop programs that will heighten awareness of human trafficking, help identify victims, and help better support survivors.

Bill 96, if passed, would allow us to move forward on other key commitments. This bill contains two statutes, the first of which—the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act—would strengthen the ways in which Ontario's justice sector is able to deal with human trafficking. The second, the Human Trafficking Awareness Day Act, would help ensure that the issue of human trafficking gains a continuing and higher profile.

Before I go into the specifics of the legislation, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the significant contributions—the absolute, significant contributions—of the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. As we all know, the member has been a tireless advocate and a strong voice on the need to end human trafficking in this province, and has helped to raise vital awareness of this complex issue.

Applause.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Yes, I think she does deserve a round of applause.

I sincerely thank the member for all that she has done in the fight against human trafficking, for her tireless efforts and for her very hard work. She is truly committed to this issue and to ensuring that our young people are kept safe.

If passed, the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act would advance the twin objectives of helping to prevent trafficking of people at risk and providing increased support for survivors.

I should make clear that all proposals apply equally to sex and labour trafficking. There's no distinction made in the legislation.

The act would create civil restraining orders that would deal specifically with the unique nature of trafficking. This would allow the courts to issue restraining orders where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a person is in danger of being trafficked. Anyone, regardless of age, could seek an order to keep themselves safe, to protect themselves, and parents or guardians could also apply if they feared a child in their care was at risk of being trafficked.

0920

This would help prevent trafficking in two key ways. It would give potential victims and caregivers a place to turn to when they realize that things are beginning to spiral down a terrible path and get out of control. And it would cause traffickers to re-evaluate their actions, since breaches of orders would be prosecuted in criminal court. There are consequences.

Courts could issue restraining orders that would impose a variety of conditions on the trafficker, not least the condition of no contact. That's so important to shattering the exploitive hold of the trafficker over the survivor.

Next, we propose to create new civil causes of action that would let survivors sue those who trafficked them for damages for harm done. This is key. There has to be recourse after the damage is done.

People who have been trafficked have experienced severe trauma—trauma that lasts a lifetime. They may have been deceived or defrauded or coerced, by people they may once have trusted, into taking actions they would never have taken on their own. They may have been abducted, and controlled through drugs. They are often subjected to continued violence. It's not uncommon for survivors to have lost years of their lives in a most debasing way. They are inevitably damaged emotionally, physically and financially.

If passed, our legislation would allow those brave survivors to more easily and effectively sue their traffickers for compensation, to rebuild their lives. This would provide them with a measure and means of justice.

To further support this direction, our government also made regulatory changes to update the list of crimes under Ontario's Victims' Bill of Rights regulation. Now it would include human trafficking. A survivor may now sue a convicted trafficker for the terrible emotional distress and damage they have caused.

A second regulatory change now allows community organizations also to apply for grant funding in order to provide much-needed support—key support—to trafficking survivors. This involves expanding the list of recipients who are eligible to receive grants under the Civil Remedies Act, 2001, regulation to include community organizations. Imagine the difference. What this does is, it could make many survivors and groups able to access ongoing, long-term support, so that these survivors never have to look back.

Our government recognizes something else we need to do: We need to get the word out to an entire community of advocates, organizations, people at risk and survivors about the new tools and protections that would be available, should this legislation be passed. We would do this through the creation of educational materials and with the outreach and awareness programs. This is so important, because we are creating tools and supports to help these young people who are at risk. They need to know that this help and support is out there. We have to get the word out to them that there is help and that they can access it.

The second statute proposed under Bill 96 is the Human Trafficking Awareness Day Act. If passed, this would enable Ontario to proclaim February 22 of every year as Human Trafficking Awareness Day. The fact is that human trafficking cannot remain in the dark. It cannot be in the shadows of the Internet, in the back pages of magazines and behind closed doors if people are talking about it. We have to get the word out.

A designated day would put much-needed focus on the magnitude of the trafficking problem, not only here in Ontario but across Canada and internationally. It would serve as a permanent chance and reminder for people across the province to become informed about trafficking and to be encouraged to speak up and speak out against it whenever they see it, hear of it or discover that it may be going on.

To summarize, what I have been saying today is this: If passed, this legislation would mean that important

tools in the fight against human trafficking could be put into place. It would allow potential victims—young people, those at risk—and the people who care about them to apply for restraining orders. It would make it easier for survivors to get compensation from the terrible people who trafficked them to begin with, and it would raise very important public awareness.

Speaker, ending human trafficking is important to all of us. Human traffickers, whether acting alone or as part of criminal networks, are preying on the most vulnerable in our society. They groom them and exploit them, reap large benefits at their expense, rob them of their safety, their dignity, their human potential, their human rights—and at great cost, not only to the individual but to our society as a whole. This is a crime that all of us feel, and all of us should be understanding of and be sensitive to. We just cannot let this happen. Trafficking represents nothing less than an assault on human rights and an assault on our young people who are at risk.

As I turn this debate over to the member from Ottawa—Vanier, I urge all members to keep in mind the nightmare existence that trafficking victims are living with right now and that we have the opportunity today to help prevent, by supporting this important legislation.

Human trafficking must absolutely be stopped. No Ontarian should live with fear or the threat or experience of exploitation and violence. We all deserve to feel safe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would like to thank the minister. Now I turn it over to the member from Ottawa—Vanier.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Il me fait plaisir de participer au débat sur le projet de loi 96 contre la traite des personnes. La traite des personnes est un problème pernicieux qui peut affecter de nombreuses familles : des jeunes filles et des jeunes hommes qui sont ciblés, dépossédés de leurs repères, isolés et exploités sans vergogne.

I would like to join the minister in expressing my abhorrence of human trafficking. It's a serious issue that affects women, young men, and particularly indigenous and immigrant women who are targeted and used to support criminal activities. Migrant workers, at-risk youth and youth in care are all being targeted often to participate in criminal activities. We know that vulnerable people all around the world—and in Ontario and in Ottawa—Vanier—are being pursued, lured and then exploited.

The bill is an important step because it aims to protect Ontarians from human trafficking by doing several things. It will assist in raising the profile of the issue, help us understand the issue better, and raise awareness. It will also protect and prevent the occurrence of human trafficking by issuing restraining orders. And, finally, it aims to destroy the industry of trafficking by allowing damages to be pursued.

It will make Ontario a leader in Canada in the fight against human trafficking. It builds on the work that Manitoba has done, but it goes a little bit further, and I will try to explain how it does so.

If passed, Bill 96 will create two statutes, and I will discuss them both. The first one is the Human Trafficking Awareness Day Act, 2017, which declares February 22 Human Trafficking Awareness Day. This is an important step, because we know that human trafficking is a silent crime. It is invisible. It is often unrecognized. We all need to continue to raise awareness of the crime, of the victims of the crime and the way in which it is perpetrated all across Ontario. This day will be important for all of us to continue to raise awareness, pay attention to the lives of people that have been destroyed, as well as commit to preventing it from occurring again.

The second bill that we will be talking about is the Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act. If passed, this bill will provide for two things: (1) It will provide for the obtaining of restraining orders; and (2) it will create a new tort of human trafficking. Let me go through both of these aspects.

0930

First of all, the bill uses the same definition as the Criminal Code for human trafficking. This is important and it is a distinction from the Manitoba legislation. It does so because, indeed, the definition of the Criminal Code of Canada is one of the most inclusive that exists and, I think, reflects well the work that has been done around the world to denounce human trafficking.

The Criminal Code of Canada provides that any person who “recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person, or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person, for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation” is guilty of human trafficking.

Importantly, under the Criminal Code, it is not necessary to establish that the person has not consented to the event. That is, consent does not matter. That’s very important in the fight against human trafficking, because elsewhere at times, particularly in the United States, requiring the proof of no consent has prevented people from being able to recover damages or from obtaining due protection, because people are often lured into committing and accessing and being trafficked. They agree to come to Canada, for example, on the basis that they will be helped or that they’re going to have good work, or they are going to be able to have an education. Then, while they are in Canada, their passport or their identification is removed and they are then put into sexually exploitative or other exploitative work.

In a way, I think we all know that human trafficking has been linked to a new form of slavery. The approach that we have to take is as serious as we should have done against slavery. This bill is moving toward that direction.

I want to thank, as well, the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for her great work on this. It was very inspiring to read the private member’s bill and to move forward.

It is necessary as well to imagine the first tool that is in this bill, if passed, which is the restraining order. The restraining order is a necessary tool of prevention to control and curtail human trafficking. It’s a tool that’s

commonly used by the courts to control unwanted contact between persons in certain circumstances. This is the tool that we have decided to use here.

The way in which we would imagine this tool being put forward is in the following way: A person can ask for the restraining order to be implemented. It can be the potential victim, but also her parents or guardians; also, it could be someone else. That’s an important part of the bill. It expands the number of people that can ask for the restraining order. For example, eventually we could imagine that, at times, a school principal who would understand and have reasonable grounds to believe that, in fact, some of the students are being targeted could ask for restraining orders. That may prevent and create some safeguards for the students.

Courts could issue orders in situations where human trafficking has not yet occurred but where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a person might be trafficked. Certainly, the court will look at a variety of circumstances in order to decide whether a restraining order is warranted; for example, the respective ages of the victim and the respondent; the victim’s immigration status; whether the victim has a physical or mental disability—we know that people with mental disabilities are often targeted by exploiters; the nature of the relationship between the victim and the respondent; whether the respondent is in a position of trust, power or authority in relation to the victim; the use of threats or any form of intimidation; the use of force; the use of deception or fraud. All are going to be circumstances to look at.

Also, very importantly, the bill provides that the provision of alcohol or narcotics to the victims will also be circumstances to be evaluated, because that is often the way in which victims are lured into the activities and are lured away from their neighbourhood.

Also, the bill, if passed, provides a range of conditions that can attach to restraining orders. Many of them, I think, reflect the good work and the best practices that exist around the world on restraining orders dealing with human trafficking. Particularly, it may prohibit the respondent, who would be the alleged perpetrator, from communicating directly or indirectly, particularly by Internet, with victims; prohibit the respondent from attending certain areas where the victim is, specifying the distance between the victim and the offender—for example, prohibiting the respondent from visiting a school, a shelter, a youth facility, a place of residence, a place of worship or a place of employment; and require the respondent to return documents to victims, in particular passports or identity documents. That is often what prevents people from escaping because the perpetrator has their documents and, therefore, they’re at utmost vulnerability of being deported. It will also possibly require the respondent to return to the victim original or any copies of visual recordings of the victim, particularly ones that would have been put on the Internet, which would expose the victim to be recognized, or to have been indeed taken, violating her privacy; and finally, prohibit the respondent from possessing, making, transmit-

ting, making available or even selling a visual recording of the victim, again, with that same provision to try to prevent sexual exploitation—nudity, for example—of the victim.

In order to ensure that the rights of the respondent are protected, there is a possibility in the bill for the respondent to appear and be heard and modify the conditions of the restraining order, if circumstances justify it; for example, if circumstances change. Violating the restraining order or violating any of the conditions is obviously an offence under the Criminal Code and, therefore, likely to be prosecuted.

I think it's important to recognize that, indeed, this restraining order is a stepping stone in understanding and preventing the occurrence of human trafficking and will go a long way to empowering victims and communities to respond to it in a proactive manner.

Let me move to the second part of the bill that provides for the creation of a tort of human trafficking; that is, a civil action that could be brought by a survivor against anyone who was involved in trafficking. This includes anyone who knowingly benefited from trafficking and who facilitated the trafficking by concealing or destroying travel, identity or immigration documents.

The creation of a tort is important here because it is part of a range of mechanisms put forward to deal with the violation of human rights around the world. There's a large movement around the world to recognize that criminal law is important to fight human trafficking, but often it's not enough. We want to get at the way in which human trafficking occurs: because it makes money. And the way in which you can get at an organization that has money is, potentially, by hitting it where it hurts, which is to get money out of it. I think, although it's not going to be applicable in all circumstances, a new tort of human trafficking can go a long way to actually destroying the industry. That's the reason why it is part of this bill.

0940

This new tort certainly has other advantages. I think people who have represented survivors of sexual abuse and have had the privilege of acting for women who have been abused in the past—suing can also be a way of telling one's story in an official forum and can also have an empowering and healing aspect to it. The ability to control the process—as opposed to being in the criminal court, where you don't always control everything that happens to you—is something that victims often search for. The ability to sue and confront the offender, not beyond reasonable doubt—in a civil court, it's mainly on the balance of probabilities. It's an easier burden of proof. This ability to sue and obtain damages often helps victims heal in some fashion.

Importantly, the bill, if passed, would provide for recovery of damages to the victim, but also punitive damages to get at the fact that money was made in this context. That's an important way, and I think it reflects a little bit the best practices around the world in terms of how to get to human rights violations that have particularly pernicious effects on some of the victims.

Civil suits may not always be appropriate in every case because sometimes it's hard to find the traffickers; they often have disappeared from the jurisdiction. Nevertheless, it's important that there is a right of action in Ontario because we will be part of a larger place where nowhere else can traffickers escape. We should be part of that network of places where it's possible to sue a trafficker.

Let me talk a little bit. I think it's important to see this tort. It's a new tort. I think it's important to recognize that even when one might have thought that the current law, the current tort actions, might be sufficient, I think it's now well known in the literature that naming the tort “human trafficking” eases the burden for the victims to sue. They could be under forcible confinement. There may be other torts that are applicable. It will be easier for them to sue if we create a new tort. That seems to be the way in which, looking at the literature, particularly the American literature—it's quite convincing on that score.

In a way, the proposed tort is a way to hold traffickers accountable, and hopefully destroy the industry in the long run. It does give survivors the ability to have the harm that they have suffered recognized and some measure of compensation for everything that they have lost.

Évidemment, ce projet de loi doit être lu dans le contexte global de la lutte contre la traite des personnes.

It certainly is important to read this bill in the context of all the other actions that are necessary to confront human trafficking. Many of them have been mentioned by the minister, but let me just make sure that we look at this bill in its proper context.

Certainly criminal prosecution of traffickers continues to be of the utmost importance to dismantle the networks that exist, expose them, dismantle them and bring the traffickers to justice. To do so, we know, is very difficult and requires specialized policing. Indeed, I think many of the strategies that have been discussed for the last little while have been about training police officers adequately, crown officers and also inspectors under labour standards, because many of the trafficked people end up in sweatshops. It's important that our labour inspectors are able to recognize the signs as to where people are being trafficked.

The bill, as was mentioned, aims both to deter human trafficking of young people to the sex trade or to prostitution, but also to protect people who are being trafficked in what we call labour human trafficking, who are being trafficked into places where their rights will be violated and they won't be paid and will be made to work for long hours without any protection. Migrant workers are particularly at risk in that context. They may have been lured by promises of big payouts, and arrive in Ontario and are unable to realize that promise and are put in dire circumstances where their right to health and safety is being breached as well as their right to get paid for the work that they have done, and sometimes are being shipped around so that they are unable to escape the trafficker's grasp.

An initiative that the government is planning to do is certainly to continue to appropriately train police offi-

cers, labour officers and crowns to ensure that we are able to detect and support adequately the deterrents through the criminal law of human trafficking. I might mention that the OPP has laid the groundwork for a new anti-trafficking coordination office which will be able to help in coordinating all the efforts that are necessary. Particularly important, the goal of this office is to respond to the needs of different municipalities that see that there is trafficking occurring, and also First Nations, who are particularly targeted at times. The OPP is establishing a team to gather intelligence and share information across the province to proactively respond to and disrupt the human trafficking activities that are suspected.

There's a human trafficking investigative course that has been developed that will be delivered to help officers navigate the complexities of identifying and gathering evidence of trafficking. Additionally, our government is creating a provincial human trafficking prosecution team that will be specialized in doing the work. It involves, obviously, the coordination of an enhanced prosecutorial model that will ensure that specialized crowns with expertise will be able to work co-operatively with police and other partners to move forward on that score.

Training is very important, we know, because there's something pernicious about trafficking. It's a crime that has a network throughout the world and also is well-organized as an underground activity. So the same way we want to have trained police officers for gangs and for narcotics and drugs, we need specialized prosecutors and police for human trafficking. It's important that we recognize this need by doing additional training and support so that we get to be the experts in the field.

I think the bill is important because it will create new tools of prevention that I think will help, as well, our knowledge about what, indeed, is done and how it is done to enhance the criminal prosecution of the perpetrators. Certainly, it is important that partners have the knowledge and the understanding to move forward.

In that respect, I think one of the aspects that I want to mention is that last month the Ministry of the Attorney General hosted a human trafficking summit for justice where different partners were there talking about sharing best practices. The two-day summit had survivors of human trafficking explaining and detailing the painful journey that they have taken, but also police, crown attorneys, victim witness assistants, program workers and community services were all there sharing best practices. I think we want to move a little bit from the impetus of this summit to make sure that we give the tools to all concerned to adequately support victims and also equip them to have the tools to protect themselves better.

0950

I want to also talk a little bit about the way in which—there has been an amendment. The last point that I wanted to mention is that human trafficking will also be recognized under the Victims' Bill of Rights, therefore entitling all the victims to the same protection as other victims would require, particularly in terms of assistance during a prosecution, help in having their rights respected during the criminal trial.

Certainly we know that human trafficking survivors experience incredible trauma. They require targeted services and support to help them recover. It's a long journey to recover from being trafficked. Trafficking hurts people and their identity. It's a crime against their dignity. They lose the control over their lives, and this is the hurt—the target of human dignity—that we're trying to remedy here by ensuring that people have the tools to protect themselves and we give the tools to the guardians and the parents and the community to ensure that we create spaces of protection for youth that would be targeted particularly, and eventually give to survivors the tools to stand in court and claim damages for what has been done to them.

I think that's an important aspect. We want to prevent it, but we know that there are currently people around Ontario who have suffered great damages and who are hopefully wanting to stand up and hold traffickers accountable for what they have done and destroy their industry by getting some damages that will allow them to move forward.

Les trafiquants profitent, évidemment, de la vulnérabilité de leurs victimes. Il nous incombe à tous et à toutes de mettre de l'avant des mesures qui permettent aux victimes de se protéger et aux familles de protéger leurs enfants de façon responsable. Le projet de loi, s'il est adopté, donne à l'Ontario un rôle de chef de file dans la protection contre la traite des personnes. J'espère que nous pourrions compter sur l'appui de tous les membres.

Human traffickers prey on vulnerable victims. Through this strategy, our government is working across ministries, and I think that's an important part as well. This is such a pernicious problem that it requires a whole-of-government approach. It cannot be done just by the Ministry of the Attorney General or the ministry of women's issues. It has to involve other ministries as well so that we make sure that indeed we see it, we name it, and we address it fully.

For example, I think the strategy involves connecting with the ministry of indigenous affairs because indigenous people are often overrepresented as human trafficking survivors. So the strategy to end human trafficking was, in fact, launched at the same time and was part of a key commitment to the indigenous community in Walking Together, which is the government strategy to end violence against indigenous women. It's important to recognize that the strategy against human trafficking was developed with the indigenous caucus on the joint working group to end violence against indigenous women. It was important to have their support and their expertise in developing this bill.

It also benefited greatly from the new human trafficking coordinator at the Ministry of the Attorney General.

We are grateful to many of the survivors who spoke at the summit and elsewhere to make their voices heard, to make sure that what we are presenting today responds adequately to their needs. I was struck, actually, by the way in which the range of factors that are in the bill under section 4(3) reflect very much the words and the

stories that we have heard from the survivors, and the multiplicity of stories, the way in which some women or young women had been abused and taken advantage of in a context of a relationship of power, where they had trust—they had communicated on the Internet with someone, they trusted them, and then were lured into criminal activities.

Taking advantage of their vulnerability due to their immigration status was one of the stories that often was mentioned. Taking advantage of mental difficulties, of addiction—all these difficulties, all the vulnerabilities that came from the stories of survivors are reflected in this bill. I think that's the way in which we want to move forward.

I was also struck by the range and the flexibility of the conditions that are being put forward on restraining orders. It seems to me that providing for the restraining order to be tailored to the circumstances of the victim to allow her—sometimes him—to be better protected is what we need. There's good balancing here, because if, indeed, the restraining order that can be obtained on an *ex parte* basis—that is, without the presence of the respondent—is too severe and goes too far, there's a possibility for the respondent to come back and change the circumstances, for example, if the diameter of the circumstances where he or she cannot operate is too wide. The bill provides this balancing act to make sure that, indeed, we protect the rights of everyone, but it pays attention—I think it's important—to the reality of what survivors are exposed to, to ensure that the restraining orders respond well to where they are, where they were and where they don't want to be again.

Let me conclude with the fact that we recently announced the selection of the Ontario Native Women's Association to deliver the Ontario Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Liaisons Program. It's important to see that this is a partnership with the Ontario Native Women's Association. I think that will go a long way to ensuring that we will reach all the women who should be reached by this bill, and I think we should all commit to continuing the good work to maintain a prevention and awareness campaign on human trafficking as it affects indigenous people.

Finally, I want to end with the several province-wide human trafficking protocols that are also developed with children's aid societies. Other targeted youth are often youth in care—vulnerable youth who can be easily lured by promises of money, promises of work, promises of reaching a new destination, promises of escape, promises of being together with a large group of people, promises of fun, and promises, sometimes, of access to alcohol or drugs. So I think this initiative to make a protocol with children's aid societies will also help in being more adept in curbing human trafficking.

There are also youth-in-transition workers who will be in places like Ottawa, Windsor, London, Thunder Bay and the GTA. I know that in my riding of Ottawa-Vanier, this is particularly important because we know that many people arrive in Ottawa from the north, from

Nunavut and from surrounding areas, and are quite vulnerable, looking desperately for a place to stay, looking desperately for work. They can be easily lured by traffickers. The new youth-in-transition workers could help an average of over 180 more youth annually and be a form of outreach. I think there will be a little bit of outreach to understand what the new forms of trafficking are. We need people on the ground to help us understand how traffickers change their techniques over time and make sure that we continue to respond adequately to this pernicious tragedy.

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The government is working hard to implement broader supports. Obviously, nobody would think that this bill alone will stop human trafficking, but certainly I think it goes a long way to helping give tools of awareness, tools of prevention and tools to curb the industry. It also, in my mind, must be understood in the context of a larger strategy to alleviate poverty and to reduce homelessness that will also be necessary if we want to respond adequately to the plight of these young people.

Si le projet de loi est adopté, nous serons en mesure de mieux répondre aux besoins des victimes de la traite des personnes. C'est un projet de loi qui agit à plusieurs niveaux, qui agit tout d'abord au niveau de la prévention en donnant des outils nouveaux pour agir contre le risque de la traite des personnes. C'est aussi un projet de loi qui, s'il est adopté, donne le droit aux victimes d'obtenir des dommages et intérêts pour finalement leur permettre d'être bien indemnisées, mais surtout de contrer l'industrie de la traite des personnes. C'est finalement un projet de loi qui permet de nommer un jour pour identifier et pour continuer de se souvenir du problème de la traite des personnes.

C'est donc un projet de loi complet qui est mis de l'avant pour répondre à ce problème pernicieux de notre société. Nous devons agir maintenant. Trop de jeunes sont la proie de la traite des personnes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the minister and the member for Ottawa-Vanier for their presentations this morning. It's great that we are finally talking about a bill, on second reading, to combat human trafficking, and I want to thank the government for bringing it forward. But they had an opportunity to deal with this some time ago. This is how I find that this place just doesn't work right sometimes. The government has the power to kill a private member's bill or to move it through the system.

I want to thank my colleague the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for bringing this item to the attention of this Legislature well over a year and a half ago. I had the opportunity to join her at an anti-human trafficking meeting in Ottawa last fall. She opened my eyes an awful lot about what a scourge this problem is. The minister did talk about how we all thought this was a problem that affected primarily young girls from other countries. We didn't understand how

much it was right here at home. So the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, you can take a bow. You can be very proud of what is happening in this Legislature today. This is your victory for the victims of human trafficking.

We are here today, and we want to move ahead. This business of human trafficking—the more we learn about it, the more we recognize how sickening it is. There are so many things that need to be done to stop this scourge. If there is no demand for a product, a product won't sell. We have to make sure that the demand for young girls, particularly, from the sick people who want that type of sexual activity—we've got to stop that demand, and we've got to get to those people who have those strange feelings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very glad that we are having this conversation and this debate. I appreciate the words from the government in their conversation about Bill 96, the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, both from the minister and the member from Ottawa-Vanier.

I'm glad to be hearing language in this Legislature recognizing this for what it is, talking about it as a new form of slavery, talking about the kind of organized, underground, insidious, pernicious—as you said—industry. While I wouldn't say, as the last member just called it, the demand for the product—a reminder that we are talking about our girls. To have anyone see them as product brings it to that point that we need to re-humanize our children and our girls.

I taught grades 7 and 8, and I'm looking forward to this debate to tell not just some of their stories, but to talk about the conversations and the reality that they're facing. You know, we're in Oshawa. We're part of that 401 corridor. Our little girls are on the Internet having conversations with cute boys, and then they meet them. The second time they meet them, they might smoke a joint and have to work it off, and get trafficked for the weekend to a weekend hotel party and afterwards get dropped back at home—their parents will never know what happened—and they're broken.

That's one piece of this trafficking conversation, and it is a massive conversation. It is everything you can imagine and nothing that you want to imagine, and we have to be having very real conversations in here because, as the member talked about, this is about awareness. We need to curb the industry. We need to help women and girls put the pieces of their shattered journey back together afterwards, but we have to stop it before it starts. I'm glad we're starting the conversation here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Han Dong: Good morning, everyone. I'm very pleased to be able to lend my voice in support of this very important bill. I listened carefully to the minister and the member from Ottawa-Vanier and their comments on this government bill and the reason why it is so important to move it today.

I was a member of the non-partisan select committee to end sexual abuse and harassment against women earlier last year, and I had first-hand experience listening to people who lived through that experience, telling us these problems. I remember there were several groups telling us about the problem of human trafficking. I think, in Ontario, we must address this issue. There is no place for individuals to benefit financially from these activities.

Helping vulnerable youth is the responsibility of every one of us in this Legislature. In my riding, there are organizations that are quite willing to participate and support youth to stay away from these kind of activities, but there aren't enough funding tools. I think this bill speaks to that. It will provide tools for these organizations to assist youth not just to leave these predators, but stay away from these predators and these activities.

I think it's a very comprehensive bill. It provides multiple tools not just for the vulnerable population, but as well as to organizations in our society that are able to assist in these very vulnerable communities.

Thank you very much for giving me this chance to speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I am truly pleased that we are debating this bill today, and that the government has brought in the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, 2017. Certainly, as I'll say, it was called the Saving the Girl Next Door Act, which really sums up what we're talking about today here in the Legislature.

I'm going to say that, in 2015, I started this ball rolling, asking for a task force, a coordination—I'm glad the government is speaking in those terms—of police, victims' services, the justice system, crowns and judges.

In 2015-16, I introduced the Saving the Girl Next Door Act twice. I will say that I really had wished that we were discussing this a year ago and making the movements toward enforcing such an important piece of legislation to save our girls.

It is no question that this is modern-day slavery, this is a human rights violation and it's child abuse. When I first started talking about this piece of legislation, the average age of a trafficked victim was 14. Now they're telling me it's 13. It's an urgent issue; no question. It needs urgent action. I travelled the province from Kenora to Hamilton to Belleville to London to Kitchener-Waterloo to Sudbury to Windsor because we need to tell people about it.

1010

We need to help our front lines with the education they need. Much more needs to be done. I think the strength of the survivors that have come forward—I'm going to mention a couple today: Timea Nagy; Simone Bell; victims' services people such as Megan Walker from London and the many, many police services that took the time to educate myself and educate all of us.

You will have no opposition from this side of the Legislature. Get it to committee. Let's get royal assent. Let's do it now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the minister responsible for women.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 96. I want to thank everyone who added their voice to this important piece of legislation today.

Our government recognizes that human trafficking is a devastating crime and a human rights violation that results in serious and long-term trauma. Ontario has become, as we all know, a major centre for human trafficking in Canada, with 65% of national human trafficking cases reported to police originating in Ontario. That's why we've launched Ontario's Strategy to End Human Trafficking, investing up to \$72 million. More importantly, it's going to ensure that survivors have the supports and services that they need to heal from this brutal crime.

It's why, really, we have introduced the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, 2017, which would create two very important statutes. If passed, these statutes would allow individuals to apply for restraining orders against human traffickers, something that some of them were not able to do before; make it easier for victims of human trafficking to get compensation from those who traffic them, so really give them some recourse; and it would also proclaim February 22 of each year as Human Trafficking Awareness Day, which is so important.

We have also made regulatory changes that would help victims of trafficking by allowing them to sue their traffickers for compensation after sustaining emotional distress and allow community organizations that are out there that support some of these victims to apply for grant funding so that they can continue their important work under the Ontario Civil Remedies Act, 2001.

Once again, Ontario is moving on a made-in-Ontario solution. We are proposing this legislation that would make our province a leader in the fight against human trafficking. If passed, this legislation would raise awareness, support survivors and hold human traffickers accountable.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would like to thank all members for their contribution to debate this morning.

It is now close to 10:15, and this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we get started, I just have an announcement. It looks like we have quite a few people to introduce. I'm going to ask your indulgence to simply introduce your guests and save anything else for a later date, please.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's my great honour today, Mr. Speaker, to introduce the members of the Public Affairs Association of Canada, who are going to have a reception here in room 228 at 5:30. Everybody has to come because we've got John Capobianco the president; Robyn

Gray, the director; Cristina Onosé, the marketing chair; and Harvey Cooper, the membership chair. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to welcome a number of wonderful people from the Down Syndrome Association of Ontario; specifically, the chairperson, Deb Reid, and the vice-chair, Domenic Gentilini. They are here today and will join us at a reception at lunchtime.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'm really delighted to be able to introduce a friend, Joe MacDonald, who is head of the government relations program at Seneca. He's also a former four-term president of the Public Affairs Association, something that I was the president of as well. Welcome, Joe, and your students.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Today I would like to welcome Jennifer van Gennip and the Down Syndrome Association of Simcoe County, from my riding of Barrie. Welcome.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a great pleasure to introduce Madison Detzler. Madison is interning with me this sitting.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: Mr. Speaker, the page from Mississauga-Erindale, Max Koh, is captain today. His mother, Yi Yun, is here today in the Legislature as well. I want to welcome them.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'd like to introduce a guest of page Frances MacGregor. Her mother is here with us today, Daphne Mitchell, from the riding of Thunder Bay-Superior North.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce, from the Kawartha Credit Union, Rob Wellstood, CEO; Crystal Dayman, vice-president of marketing and corporate communications; and Michael Minicola, chair of the board. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Today it's my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature Kyra Trainor, mother of the page from Etobicoke-Lakeshore; and also my good friend Mr. John Capobianco from Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Mr. Todd Smith: On behalf of my colleague the MPP for Kitchener-Conestoga, I would like to welcome a guest of page Coletton Benham. His mother, Dharamdai Bhikam-Bhola, is with us in the public gallery this morning. We welcome her to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Further introductions?

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure, on behalf of my seatmate, Minister Michael Chan, to introduce page Eashvar Sukumar's mother, Anjula Sukumar; his father, Sukumar Balasubramaniam; and his sister Sitha Sukumar, visiting the House today. Please join me in welcoming them.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's my pleasure to introduce the parents of page Aidan Ang, who's from Forest Hill junior school in my riding. His parents are with us today: Alex Ang and Aidan's mum, Marianne Hu. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

I do have an introduction. In the Speaker's gallery is a guest from the riding of Brant, a guest of page captain Sophie Richie: her father, Kyle Richie. Welcome, Kyle.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Children and Youth Services on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I believe you'll find that we have unanimous consent for members to wear ribbons in recognizing the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent for the wearing of ribbons. Do we agree? Agreed.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice to halt the government advertising regarding the Liberals' hydro scheme until the Speaker's ruling on the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

The member from Leeds–Grenville is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? I heard a no.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you for providing me with a glimpse. If it continues into question period, I'll deal with it appropriately.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So I don't have any disruption, I have a task to do. I would ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages serving in the second session of the 41st Parliament.

From Eglinton–Lawrence, Aidan Ang; from Scarborough–Guildwood, Anjelika Guanlao; from Oak Ridges–Markham, Ayesha Basu; from Ottawa West–Nepean, Catherine Rootham; from Beaches–East York, Charlotte Morgan; from Kitchener–Conestoga, Coletton Benham; from Markham–Unionville, Eashvar Sukumar; from Mississauga–Streetsville, Ethan Hann; from Niagara Falls, Faith Phibbs; from Thunder Bay–Superior North, Frances MacGregor; from Thornhill, Jace Kramer; from Oakville, Joshua Geddes; from Durham, Keira Hodgins; from Don Valley East, Kishan Muhundhan; from Windsor–Tecumseh, Laura Middleton; from Dufferin–Caledon, Matthew Ahn; from Mississauga–Erindale, Max Koh; from Kenora–Rainy River, Naomi Carradice; from Sarnia–Lambton, Nicholas Bhola; from Pickering–Scarborough East, Rajeev Danam; from Brant, Sophie Richie; from St. Paul's, Taylor Wilson; and from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Zara Trainor.

These are our pages for the next few weeks.

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ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On March 20, 2017, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, Mr. Smith, gave written notice of his intention to raise a point of privilege with respect to certain answers by the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to the member's written questions on the order paper. I am now prepared to rule on this matter without hearing further from the member, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

According to the member, the minister's answers did not provide specific information, thereby obstructing the member's ability to participate in a proceeding in Parliament on certain topics; moreover, the member states that because the minister declined to provide information that would instead only be given to officials of the municipalities affected by the government's decisions—effectively cutting him out of representing those municipalities, even though they are in his riding—he has been obstructed in his ability to perform his parliamentary functions.

In response, let me first say that when the member from Prince Edward–Hastings tabled his written questions and when the minister answered them, they were both carrying out a parliamentary responsibility. Second, it is a minister's prerogative to answer written questions as the minister sees fit; the Speaker does not review the accuracy of such answers. On this point, please see the Speakers' rulings on page 61 of the Journals for March 15, 1935, page 194 of the Journals for November 4, 1980, and page 1604 of the Hansard for May 18, 2010.

A member may ask questions, but a minister is not obliged to make a response that is entirely and always satisfactory to a member. Let me equate this to the daily question period. I have reviewed the written answers to the member's questions and am quite confident that if those were answers to oral questions in question period, those would have been perfectly orderly responses—though perhaps the member might not have been satisfied with them, just as he is not satisfied with the written responses. If the Speaker would have been procedurally unconcerned with the responses had they been made to an oral question, why ought the Speaker be procedurally concerned with the very same responses to written questions?

Now, more specifically on the issue of the minister declining to disclose information to the member and saying he would only do so with officials of a specific municipality, I have to say that there is nothing about the inherent status of a member of provincial Parliament that entitles a member to private or proprietary information that any other third party would not be entitled to have. It is not a breach of a member's privileges to have this kind of information withheld from them. While the House collectively could resolve to order production of such information, and the minister would be compelled to provide it, no individual member has the authority to do so.

For the foregoing reasons, I find that a prima facie case of contempt has not been made out. I want to thank

the member for raising his concern with me in the proper way.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Out of respect for the Legislature, will the Premier immediately halt all the hydro vanity ads until the Speaker has ruled on the case for contempt? Will the Premier please answer?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, again, as you know, this matter is before you. This matter has been referred to you, so of course we await a ruling.

On this side of the House, we are focused on making sure that we bring meaningful relief to the people of Ontario, that we reduce the hydro rates by 25%. That's what the government is doing. It's a very important policy.

Obviously the opposition is only engaged in distraction because they have no plan. They are actually really confused, and given that they have no plan, they are relying on procedural tactics, denying opportunities for Ontarians to have access to important information that will ensure that they know exactly the kinds of steps the provincial government is taking; that is, to reduce their hydro rates by 25%.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The issue here is about ads, paid for by taxpayers, that are used for partisan purposes. Yesterday, the minister said the following: "I'm very pleased to rise and talk about when we're going to be bringing forward the legislation this spring" to enact the Liberal hydro scheme. Clearly the legislation is coming forward, and the minister is making a mockery of this Legislature and its members as he runs self-congratulatory ads, paid for by taxpayers.

Will the Premier stop her re-election campaigning and using taxpayer resources to do it? It's wrong, and the Premier knows that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Absolute abuse.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We're getting close.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I think the member opposite is confused. I think he still thinks that he's sitting in the Harper government, where they ran ad after ad on Harper's Economic Action Plan and he kept touting that.

On this side of the House, this government has taken some very concrete measures in making sure that we have one of the strongest pieces of legislation when it comes to government advertising. Our government has strengthened legislation to provide a clear definition of partisan advertising, requiring the government to submit

a preliminary version of the ad to the Auditor General for review and reinforce rules around government advertising during general elections.

Under our legislation, the government ad can't include the name, the voice or the image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly, including the name or logo of a party, or directly identify and criticize a recognized party or member of the assembly.

The members opposite, of course, remember the good old Harris days where they were able to do that. We have passed legislation, and that will not be allowed in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The minister quotes and references the Auditor General. The Auditor General's powers have been stripped. She said on the record last Friday that she wouldn't have supported these. They're simply a pat on the back.

I will continue. The Minister of Energy said they will spend "under \$1 million on both the radio ads and the social media ads" but there will be "more to come."

The question everyone asks is, how much more? How many millions is this government going to spend of hard-earned taxpayer dollars for their own partisan purposes?

My question is to the Premier: Do you really think it's right to use taxpayer dollars to run partisan ads? It's wrong. Stop it. Everyone in Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I continue, I'm going to make an observation, and then we'll deal with it accordingly. When someone is asking a question, I'm hearing heckling from the same side. When somebody is answering, I'm hearing heckling from the same side. That's not appropriate either way when I'm trying to bring decorum to the place. It doesn't do anything but elevate the problem. That said, I would also remind the leader that you speak to the Chair, please, directly.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, the Ontario government has a response—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As soon as I sit, someone decides that they're going to test me, so I'm tested. The member from Nepean—Carleton is warned. We are now in warnings.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The government has a responsibility to inform Ontarians, to make sure that we raise awareness and communicate—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds—Grenville is warned.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think it's important that we communicate important, vital information to Ontarians. We know that people's hydro bills have been a serious concern for Ontarians. It is important that they know what the government plan is.

Speaker, we have a plan. We are going to be cutting electricity rates by 25%. What Ontarians are asking of the official opposition is: What is your plan? The reason

the opposition is so worked up about a procedural matter is because they have no plan.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex is warned. The member from Oxford is warned.

Finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Their plan is a blank piece of paper. That's what Ontarians are asking about, and they have no information on that.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on the taxpayer-funded Liberal election ads, I'm going to ask another question.

I'm going to read a quote from Mark Nantais, the president of the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association. He said that the Ontario government appears "to do nothing to address a climate of investment uncertainty related to what has been" their "number one request": to deal with "electricity rates that can be two to three times higher in Ontario than in competing auto jurisdictions."

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This manufacturing leader says the government has done nothing when it comes to hydro. Mr. Speaker, is this government going to risk the jobs of over 124,000 people employed in auto manufacturing in Ontario—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is warned.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy is going to want to comment on this question in the supplementary, but I want to just say that the record amounts of investment that we have seen in the auto industry over the last six months really speak to the reality that the auto sector in Ontario is extremely important. It's extremely strong, and we are going to continue to support it. We are going to continue to work with the auto sector, and not just the plants but the supply chain, making sure that that supply chain is in place, that it's strong, and making sure that we have the highly educated workforce we need to be innovating in the auto sector.

The whole issue around automated vehicles and artificial intelligence, that's very much the cutting edge. That's the frontier of the auto sector. That's why we're investing in those technologies, and we are doing very well in terms of North American investment in the auto sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The Premier says the government is helping the auto sector, but the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association says that their number one request about protecting these jobs in Ontario is being ignored, so the facts seem to be very different than what the Premier is suggesting.

Let me ask another question, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal caucus Q&A that was given out to Liberal members before their hydro scheme—question 29 said, "Will this rate decrease apply to curling rinks, hospitals and schools?" Mr. Speaker, do you know what the answer is? No, there's not going to be relief.

Why won't this scheme keep curling clubs and hockey rinks open? We're seeing small towns across Ontario that can barely keep these rinks, these recreational services open. Hospitals are struggling. Public institutions are struggling because of the Liberal hydro crisis. So my question to the Premier is, when can we expect relief for hockey rinks and curling rinks? When can we expect relief for hospitals and schools? They're struggling with these hydro increases.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the intensity behind the question that's coming from the Leader of the Opposition because, in fact, we have a plan that is going to reduce people's electricity bills across the province. We understand that electricity bills have been a burden for people, and we are taking action.

The Leader of the Opposition seems to suggest that he supports our plan, but he thinks that we should do more, and that's fine. We're going to continue to work with municipalities. We'll continue to work with people across the province, with businesses. The Minister of Energy is well aware that there are groups who are still looking to us and saying—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings is warned.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:—"How is this going to work for us?" But the reality is that people in Ontario will see a 25% reduction in their home electricity bills come this summer. That's something that I hope the Leader of the Opposition is tacitly saying he's supporting.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The Premier says that I said we should do more. I absolutely agree. We need to do more by not paying the Hydro One CEO \$4 million a year. We need to do more by stopping signing these ridiculous green energy contracts—1,100 more proceeded when we don't need it—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Transportation is warned.

Mr. Patrick Brown:—and you give a commission in Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York. This government is continuing to charge Ontarians to give energy away and we're spilling water power. I want them to stop that. Absolutely, we have to do more. Our hospitals can't afford it. Our small businesses can't afford it. Our seniors can't afford it.

This isn't enough. This is a Band-Aid on a bullet wound that this government created. They're borrowing money to pay for their own mistakes, and Ontarians have had enough of it.

My question for the Premier is, when can we have real relief? When can we see these contracts stop being signed? When can we see relief on hydro CEOs—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is warned. There's a couple of others here that I'm looking at. I wasn't quite sure who.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You took away my poker face. But it will still happen.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about our plan that is going to help every family, every small business and every farm in this province. While they stand up and yell and shake their fists, they actually have no plan, absolutely no plan—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings is named.

Mr. Smith was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To be clear, the member might not have known it, but he was very close to being expelled. That kind of action shall not be tolerated in this House. That goes for anybody. That's disrespectful and I won't tolerate it.

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know it's a very touchy subject for them, but they have no plan. The member even stood up to the media and laughed when asked where his plan was. He said, "In the policy department."

Our plan is bringing forward 25%—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is warned.

You have a wrap-up.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Our plan will deliver results for Ontario families, businesses and farms. They don't have one; we have one, and it is working.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Hospitals all across Ontario have been facing huge hydro bill increases on top of Liberal budget freezes and cuts. Last week, it was revealed that the Sault Area Hospital in Sault Ste. Marie saw nearly a \$1-million increase to its hydro bill in just four short years.

Since she won't release her plan, can the Premier tell Soo residents who are now facing cuts to front-line health care if her \$40-billion borrowing scheme will help the Sault Area Hospital?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know that the leader from the third party is talking about the Sault Area Hospital, so

let's be clear about what the Sault Area Hospital had to do after their media announcement. The Sault Area Hospital said that they have not made decisions directly tied to increases in electricity rates and that increases have not resulted in layoffs.

Let's also talk about hospitals. They're also eligible for a range of programs like the Save on Energy audit and retrofit initiatives to help lower their bills by becoming more energy-efficient. For example, Sudbury Health Sciences North got more than \$275,000 for help in energy efficiency upgrades, and now they're saving over \$500,000 each year in energy costs.

On top of that, the fair hydro plan will also help hospitals see a modest reduction of between 2% and 4% as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's not just northern hospitals that are suffering. Right here in Toronto, access-to-information documents show that the Mount Sinai health system saw a 45% increase in hydro bills between 2010 and 2015. That's nearly \$1.5 million that is not going to support front-line health care—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Housing is warned.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —that Torontonians depend on.

If she refuses to release the details of her phantom plan, can the Premier at least tell Mount Sinai health system if she plans to help them out with some relief?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, we did help Sinai Health System out last year by giving them an additional \$7 million for their budget, a 2.1% increase in their operating budget.

I know that my colleague the Minister of Energy quoted from the CEO of the Soo hospital, but I think it's really important that we revisit that, because the leader of the third party has a tendency to visit hospitals without having those important conversations first with the board, with the CEO.

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After her visit to Sault Ste. Marie, the hospital was forced to go out publicly, on the record, and say that while electricity costs have risen over the past five years, those increases have not resulted in any layoffs at that hospital.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier won't tell the Sault Area Hospital or the Mount Sinai health system if they're going to see some relief under the phantom plan, perhaps she could enlighten the University Health Network, which has seen its hydro bills go up by over \$6 million in six years. Or how about Toronto East General Hospital, which saw a 67% increase in six years?

The Premier needs to show Ontarians that she is serious about real relief and not just buying some support

for the Liberal Party ahead of the next election. Will she release the details of her plan?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to inform the Legislature and the public that last year we provided an increase to the University Health Network, to their operating budget, of \$9.5 million.

I need to go back to Sault Ste. Marie, because it's a tremendous hospital providing excellent care to the individuals who rely on it. The Sault Area Hospital, in the second part of their public declaration—and no, we did not ask them to do this. They felt compelled, because of the misinformation that had been provided. The Sault hospital said that it “has not made decisions directly tied to the increase in electricity rates” and that there are “no planned layoffs of front-line staff at Sault Area Hospital.”

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I have to say, it's sad that hospitals that get a little bit of money after years of freezes are having to use that to fill a hole in their budgets that the Liberal hydro plan has left them with—that's a really sad situation—when it should be going to front-line care.

The Premier has heard the facts from Sault Ste. Marie and from Toronto, but perhaps that's not enough. Let's try London. At London Health Sciences Centre, which is made up of several sites, access-to-information documents reveal that hydro consumption dropped by 13% over the same six-year period that hydro bills went up by 29%. Does the Premier not understand how this would worry Londoners who depend on good-quality care at their hospitals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we could go on all day, because I'm happy to report that for London Health Sciences Centre, we increased their operating budget last year by over \$17 million. I think it's important—so you've got your list; I've got my list. I'm happy to continue to report, Mr. Speaker, that the investments that we've made, the investments that they voted against in the last budget, where our annual increase to hospital budgets was close to 3%, include all of the hospitals that the member opposite, the leader of the third party, is referencing.

I have to say, in the almost three years that I have been Minister of Health, I have not had a single hospital board or CEO come to me and say that the component of their budget, that roughly 1%, that goes towards electricity has been a burden to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Windsor Regional Hospital's Metropolitan Campus saw a 49% increase in their hydro bills in the five years between 2011 and 2016. What does the Premier have to say to the people in Windsor, who know that not only is she lining the pockets of her banker friends with her \$40-billion phantom plan, but she's also offering hospitals in Windsor nothing at all to deal with the problems they have created in the electricity system?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think I should have provided this list in advance to the member opposite, because she'd be a little bit more careful in the hospitals that she chooses. Again, Windsor Regional Hospital: I'm happy to report that they received more than a 3% increase to their budget and, again, \$9.9 million more to that hospital corporation last year.

We continue to make these important investments, investments that routinely, regularly and consistently that party has voted against. When we added \$345 million to the operating budgets of hospitals in the budget last year, they voted against those investments. When we added an additional \$140 million last fall to support those hospitals—those are important; they're critical investments and they are investments that we take very seriously to ensure that our hospitals are able to manage and are able to provide the highest quality of care that they do in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I don't know what planet this minister is on. We've got hallway medicine happening in every hospital virtually across this province. Four years of frozen funding; a 1% increase in the last budget. They have not only made a mess of our electricity system, they have made a mess of our hospital system, and every patient that deals with hallway medicine experiences that each and every day in the province of Ontario.

I'm going to talk about my own hometown hospitals. In Hamilton, St. Joe's electricity costs doubled from \$3.98 million to \$8.15 million, an increase of 105% between 2010 and 2016—105%. Maybe the Premier can tell us, since she won't release details of her phantom plan, will that plan actually deal with the rising hydro costs, the soaring electricity bills in our hospitals across the province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm glad that this is the last supplementary, because I'm embarrassed to report—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You should be embarrassed.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, I'm embarrassed for the leader of the third party, because I think it's appropriate that this be the last supplementary on this for now—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm happy to listen to the facts. Hamilton Health Sciences: I'm pleased to report to the Legislature that last year we provided an increase of 3.6% to that corporation, \$29.4 million more to their operating budget than the previous year.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Last week I visited SunTech Greenhouses with owner Bob Mitchell. Bob is a good man. He is a proud farmer and he is known in Ottawa for his little miracles in Manotick. But between the Liberal green energy tax, the HST—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop. No, no. Start the clock. The leader of the third party is warned.

Please finish.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The HST, the new carbon tax, the Liberal green energy tax and all the waste in energy from cancelled gas plants to power lines to nowhere mean that Bob's cucumbers and his tomatoes are 30% more expensive than his Mexican counterparts. He couldn't even run his lights this past winter to grow his beefsteak tomatoes.

Liberal energy policy is doing its best to put Bob out of business, and what does he hear from the Liberal government? He hears from the PA of the Minister of Energy who says that it's humidity, not energy prices, that are forcing greenhouses down south. Bob and every other greenhouse grower in Ontario deserve an answer from this government. Will they phase in the burden of cap-and-trade—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and will they ensure that these farmers have an ability to make their profits?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask the member to sit when I stand.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I do want to thank the member for that question because the greenhouse growers throughout the province are an important part of our economy. I know the Minister of Agriculture does great work with them as well. We met with them several times to talk about the programs that are out there that actually help our greenhouse growers.

The greenhouse growers were thrilled with the fact that we actually introduced the ICI program, and dropped it from three megawatts to one megawatt, because many of those greenhouse growers can actually now apply and qualify for the ICI program, which will allow the greenhouse growers and any other business that is part of the ICI program to drop their bills by up to one third. That is significant for many of these greenhouse growers right across the province, and many of those companies as well that can benefit from the ICI program.

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And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? The Ontario fair hydro plan dropped that even further, from one megawatt to 500 kilowatts, so more businesses can apply.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That's simply not true. That's counter to everything that Bob Mitchell told me. I met with Dwight Foster of North Gower Grains—he owns the largest grain elevator operation in eastern Ontario—and Fernando Medeiros of Carleton Mushrooms. What you're telling me today is simply not true. Like SunTech, all of them produce quality food. They employ dozens, if not hundreds, of people. But the Liberal energy policies of this government over the past decade are continuing to hurt them. The Liberal PA to energy was clearly told by Jim DiMenna, president and CEO of Red Sun Farms, last

week, "Humidity, that's not a deal breaker—the cost of energy is a deal breaker."

Will the Premier stop handing out glossy flyers congratulating herself and actually do something—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —for the grain growers of this province and the people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

There are two issues in what just happened. It's the second time I've had to tell the member: When I stand, you sit. If that's the case, you may be costing your party a question, because I can skip a rotation if it continues.

Number two, you were dangerously close to making an accusation that is not permissible and is unparliamentary. I would remind the members—all members—that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly.

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know they don't like to hear the fact that the ICI program actually lowers bills by a third, but that is true, and there are thousands of businesses that are actually taking this government up and doing just that.

But the opposition is overlooking some great examples—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry is warned.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: —of greenhouses that are choosing to base their future right here in Ontario. I'm particularly pleased with the recent announcement that Greenhill Produce has planned to invest up to 100 million—

Interjection: Dollars.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Yes, \$100 million to develop a 100-acre greenhouse in Chatham-Kent, adding up to 300 jobs in this province. That is just one example of many.

We're continuing, through the Minister of Economic Development and Growth, through the great work of the Minister of Agriculture and through the great work and the leadership of this Premier, to make sure that we build this province up and make us the most competitive in North America.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Elite private clinics have been operating under this government's nose for years. When wealthy people can pay thousands of dollars to jump the queue, everyone else waits longer for their care. It hurts seniors, it hurts patients, it hurts families, and it violates the principles of the Canada Health Act.

The health minister says that he has been monitoring these private clinics. He says he's been watching them very closely, and I thank him for that. I think it's important work.

Will the Premier release the records of these investigations of private clinics or will she keep them secret?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm happy to have this question again today and I'm happy to reiterate on behalf of this government our absolute commitment to medicare, to universal health care, to the Canada Health Act and the work that we do—that I do—on a daily basis to ensure that the principles behind those important acts and pieces of legislation are upheld in this province.

As I mentioned yesterday, it was our government—it was not a previous government; it was our government—in 2004 that first and substantially and emphatically put in place measures to ensure that those principles were upheld, introducing legislation in 2004 that made it illegal for any person or entity to charge or accept any benefit for an insured service in addition to the amount that is paid by OHIP.

I'm happy to go into more details in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: So that we all remember, the question is, will you release the records? We should be cutting wait times for every family, every senior and every patient, but instead, the Liberal government is telling people to pay up or wait longer. Today we have private clinics charging thousands of dollars to allow people to jump the queue. We have for-profit companies charging up to \$100 for telemedicine appointments. We have people in pain who feel that they have no choice but to pay up, because they cannot suffer the wait time any longer for the care that they need.

The Premier can do the right thing for all of those people, the right thing for our public health care: She can release those records of the monitoring of private clinics in Ontario. Premier, will you do the right thing?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Ontario has the—and I'm referencing these because they were referenced by the member opposite yesterday, her concern about wait times, and again today. Ontario has the shortest wait time in the country for a CAT scan. Ontario has the shortest wait time in the country for an ultrasound. Ontario has the shortest wait time in the country for an MRI. In Ontario, the wait time for a PET scan is on the order of four to five working days. That time is actually going to likely get even quicker for the residents of Sudbury once, in a year's time, they have a fully operational PET scanner at their local hospital.

But it is important that we monitor and ensure that those principles I described earlier are upheld. In 2004, we also made it illegal for any person to pay, charge or receive payment to receive special or expedited access to the medicare system.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, we know the importance of ensuring

students receive the best possible education. We are illustrating that this is a top priority by making important investments in our education system. Our students consistently rank among the best in national and international student achievement results, and 71% of elementary students are meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and math, up by 17 percentage points since 2003.

Minister, we all know how committed our government is to helping our kids become lifelong learners, despite the claims of the opposition—like, for example, building new schools in my riding for Port Hope, Cobourg, Brighton-Cramahe and Brighton.

Speaker, through you to the minister, can you tell us more about the investments we've made in our schools and how it's benefiting our students?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thank you to the member from Northumberland-Quinte West for this question. The member has been a terrific advocate for his community, and I've had the pleasure of speaking with him on a number of occasions on educational issues.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know and understand the importance of a high-quality, well-rounded education for Ontario students. This is why, since 2003, we've increased education funding to \$22.9 billion, an increase of 59%. We've also increased per-pupil funding by more than \$4,500, to \$11,709, an increase of 63%, despite declining enrolment.

After inheriting an education system in disrepair, Ontario is now an international leader in education because of our investments. We also have more students graduating today than at any other—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister. We are extremely proud to hear how our investments are helping students achieve their best in the classroom. I know the importance of supporting school boards in ensuring that funding goes to programs and services that directly benefit students.

Over the past several years, I know that there have been a lot of claims about our investments and commitment to our schools. Can the minister please provide the House with examples of how our investments are helping schools across Ontario?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thanks again to the member from Northumberland-Quinte West for his question. I'm happy to provide examples of how we are continuing to support our education system. This includes the nearly 810 new schools and more than 780 additions and renovations.

Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed last week that the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek stood in this House and made accusations with no evidence. This creates more division in our communities, not solutions. Although the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek corrected his record while blaming his leader's office, I would like to remind the House that in Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, we've invested in eight new and improved schools. Here is the proof:

—\$8.9 million to build a new St. Gabriel Catholic Elementary School;

—\$11.6 million to build a new Eastdale school;

—\$14.4 million to build a new Summit Park school;

—\$925,000 to build an addition to Cardinal Newman—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

1120

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Last week, the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and I toured Meaford hospital, where the community is very concerned about the possible loss of surgical services with the closure of their single operating room.

The minister's failure to properly fund rural hospitals is forcing the closure of operating rooms not only in Meaford, but also in Markdale and Southampton. If the government removes surgery at Meaford hospital, the facility could become nothing more than an ambulatory care centre or, worse, it could close.

Speaker, what is the minister going to do to prevent the removal of surgical services at Meaford hospital and other rural hospitals like it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. My staff in the ministry are working with Meaford, as well as the larger corporation, to look specifically at this issue. I have to say, I appreciate it. I saw the newspaper article of the visit that the opposition members made, and it alerted me further to some of the discussion that was going on.

Of course, no decisions have been made. Nothing has been approved by the LHIN. This hasn't been mandated by the LHIN, nor has it been mandated by the ministry. It has to be approved by the LHIN and it has to be approved by the ministry.

We're always looking at ways that we can accommodate local realities and the challenges that might be faced particularly by small community hospitals, like the community hospital that I was born in. I appreciate deeply just how important hospitals like Meaford hospital are to the local community for a whole variety of reasons. We're working closely to see what we can do in this case.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: Minister, Grey Bruce Health Services is held up as a model of amalgamated community hospitals and yet, despite its best efforts, it's struggling to deliver patient care because of your waste and mismanagement.

The closure of surgical sites in any rural community means people will be forced to travel out of town to get care. I trust I don't have to remind you that transportation is almost non-existent in rural Ontario. How are all those

constituents, especially low-income families and seniors, supposed to get there and back home?

Minister, your government's callous waste and mismanagement is potentially going to harm the people of Meaford and area. Will you commit today—not just talk about, but commit today—to fixing the funding formula, so hospitals like Meaford's can continue to provide care close to home in the future, and save all this angst in the community?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm working hard and the Ministry of Health is working hard with our small towns, with local community hospitals, to help them address the unique challenges that they might be facing.

The member opposite only needs to talk to his colleague a couple of chairs beside him to understand fully what we were able to do in Leamington, where that hospital was considering closing its obstetrics ward. We were able to get involved and reverse that decision. I would hazard a guess that their obstetrics ward and the midwives who have been brought into that—it's probably a stronger service than that hospital and that community has seen in a long, long time.

Or in Quinte Health Care and the hospital in Brockville, where we have worked hard to—not Brockville—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Trenton.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Trenton—and the member has reminded me of his hard work to be able to ensure that services remain.

Lastly, I'll just ask the member opposite: I hope he'll join me when shortly we do have the groundbreaking for his brand new hospital in Markdale.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: Last week, I had a town hall on long-term care in my riding. One of my constituents told me she that was forced to take her father out of the hospital, and he has been living in a hospital bed in her living room. She has missed so much work that she isn't sure she has a job to go back to, and she is currently unable to pay her mortgage and her hydro bills because her father needs daily care.

Minister, you have failed my constituents, and I want to know exactly what you are doing for the 26,500 seniors and their families who are languishing on waiting lists, waiting for a long-term-care bed.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate this question as well. I'm not familiar with this specific case. I'm happy to discuss it, however, with the member opposite, should she wish that.

But our investments in long-term care—and not just long-term care, because it's important that we look at this holistically: hospital investments for those that require that, home care investments as well. We've increased the

home care budget year after year. I think we're in the fourth year now of a 5% increase in that budget.

We've built, since coming into office, 10,000 new long-term-care beds. We've redeveloped already or are in the process of redeveloping 13,000—well on our way to our commitment of 30,000 beds redeveloped by 2025. But there are challenges. Often, when you drill down to the individual case and when we are made aware, sometimes we have the ability, working with all our stakeholders and partners, to make a difference in that instance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Minister, the growing demand for long-term-care beds has not just come out of the blue. Experts have warned this government for more than 10 decades. Now there are 26,500 seniors and their families caught up in cycles of stress, poverty and loss of dignity. The same experts have also told you that the wait-list will double in six years to 50,000 people.

Minister, you have failed to act. Will you commit to ensuring that every senior has access to a long-term-care bed when they need it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Among the more than 10,000 long-term-care beds that we've added since coming into office are 192 new beds at Homewood Corp. in London, 160 new beds at peopleCare in London, 192 new beds at Henley Place Ltd. in London, and 32 beds at Chateau Gardens in London. We are also well on our way to redeveloping many, many beds in London as well—in excess of 500, easily. Chateau Gardens, Extendicare, Versa-Care, Dearness Home, McCormick Home, McGarrell Place, Kensington Village—all located in the London region, probably in London itself.

Certainly, we are making significant investments, including in the member's own riding and city.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'm happy to stand in this House to recognize that today is International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and direct my question to the minister responsible for anti-racism.

Speaker, approximately one year ago, the Anti-Racism Directorate was established. The minister was appointed by our Premier with a mandate to address racism in all its forms, with a focus on systemic racism. Regrettably, systemic racism is still very deeply entrenched in our day-to-day lives. We have seen it in many of our communities, such as the vandalism at the mosque in Kingston and the Islands a couple of years ago. Racism continues to negatively impact people in our province every single day. This is unacceptable and must be addressed. It is important that our government acknowledge systemic racism and take action to achieve equitable outcomes for all.

Minister, can you please outline the steps our government has taken to combat systemic racism in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the member for the question, especially on this important day.

Mr. Speaker, systemic racism is real, and it creates unfair outcomes for people here in the province of Ontario.

I had the opportunity to travel across this great province, and I spoke to many people. I spoke to them about the painful realities of racism. I want to take a moment to thank the people who came out, because I know those conversations were tough and very painful, and it wasn't an easy thing for people to do. Many of these conversations were frustrating and difficult. But we listened to people's stories. We listened to ideas. We've taken those ideas and we've brought a strategy forward that I think we all can be proud of.

On March 7, our government introduced A Better Way Forward, a three-year strategic plan to fight racism here in the province of Ontario and to really build an anti-racism approach to the way the government does things. I'm very proud to be here today to talk about that strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Minister, for that response and for your work in our communities.

I'm proud to see that our government has put forward a plan to address systemic racism. This is much needed, and I know that there will be many constituents in my riding of Kingston and the Islands who appreciate and support this work.

Speaker, we know that communities face deep histories and legacies of marginalization that continue to shape outcomes today. Research shows that some populations, particularly indigenous people, face systemic racism and disproportionately worse socio-economic outcomes compared to others. We know, for example, that black and indigenous people are overrepresented in the child welfare and justice systems.

Minister, can you tell us how this plan will combat racism in our public institutions?

1130

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you again for the question. Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the Minister of Education, the Attorney General, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, and many other ministers and members on this side of the House for being there and helping build this plan. We're taking a whole-of-government approach to build a plan that will fight racial disparities here in the province of Ontario. The Anti-Racism Directorate will partner with ministries to pilot and collect this aggregated data in child welfare, justice and education.

Mr. Speaker, we have a three-year plan. That strategic plan attempts to reduce disparities and disproportionalities affecting indigenous and racialized people in government policies, programs and services. It also looks to ensure sustainability and accountability, to increase education and public awareness of systemic racism, and to work collectively with communities to eliminate systemic racism.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, for 47 years, Swan's Variety was a landmark in the village of Athens. Swan's

survived a major fire and lasted through the terms of eight Premiers, but not the ninth. On Friday, heartbroken owner Karen Swan turned out the lights for the last time. It wasn't the lack of customers that spelled the end for Swan's; it was the crippling cost of hydro, culminating in last month's outrageous \$7,000 bill.

The Premier diminishes the hydro crisis and energy poverty she created by calling it a mistake. Speaker, what does the Premier have to say to Karen Swan, who just paid for this mistake with her family business?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know the circumstances around this business. What I do know is that there are small businesses all over the province that are going to see a 25% reduction this summer. We know that it's not just individuals or families in their homes who have been carrying a burden and, as we have said, have been asked to pay for upgrades to a system that had been neglected—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): My resolve still exists. That's just a simple reminder. If it continues, we'll move right along.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: They have been asked to pay for improvements in the system that will last for many, many years, which is why we're spreading the cost of those over a longer period of time.

Again, I don't know the specific circumstances around this business, but we understand very clearly that small businesses, mom-and-pop businesses, in towns around the province need support.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: Speaker, for years the Premier ignored our warnings that unaffordable hydro rates were destroying our communities. Now, when her political future is at stake, she suddenly claims to care. They shamelessly spend taxpayer dollars on ads designed to portray themselves as heroes in a disaster they created. But if she stops patting herself on the back and looks around, she'll see that no one is buying it. Ontarians will never forget that this Premier did nothing as hydro rates soared, businesses closed and families were forced from their homes.

Speaker, will the Premier admit that it was her failed leadership on the hydro crisis that cost Karen Swan everything she had?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: The honourable member used the word "disaster." That was the electricity grid that they left for us. They left the province and the electricity grid in a disaster. We had rolling brownouts on a regular basis—a blackout, Mr. Speaker.

So we acted. This government—this party—acted, and made sure that we rebuilt the system, rebuilt generation, rebuilt transmission and rebuilt distribution. That was needed to ensure that all businesses in this province and all families in this province were able to keep the lights on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're making sure that we're reducing those bills by 25% for small businesses, for farms

and for families right across the province. And let's not forget a 40% to 50% reduction for those folks who are Hydro One customers.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I have a situation that proves that privatization is a disaster. Your government went and privatized the delivery of Internet services and long distance in north-eastern Ontario, when you privatized Ontera. Now what happens is, I get phone calls from constituents like Bill Waychison in Timmins, who ended up losing his Ontera service, which had very high-speed Internet, up and down, so that he could do what he had to do. He was forced to go to the private sector, with Bell, to purchase Internet service. The cost went up by 50%, and his service went down, with a lower bandwidth.

Will you finally admit that privatization of public services is a bad thing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. What I know about the file is simply this: In October 2014, the province and the board completed the sale of Ontera to Bell Aliant, which is now Bell Canada. The reality is that, over the past decade, Ontera was not able to generate sufficient revenues to cover its operating and capital expenses. The government had external financial experts look at ONTC's books and evaluate the costs of keeping Ontera in public hands. They found that keeping Ontera was going to cost about \$148 million in the long term, and that by selling it we could actually save \$96 million. The cost to the ONTC of continuing to own Ontera was greater than the short-term cost associated with the sale.

I look forward to providing more information in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, what hogwash. Ontera was set up for the reason that there isn't a large enough market for the private sector to deliver the service needed. So that's why the Ontario government stepped in with Ontera so that people in places like Timmins and people in Iroquois Falls and other communities are able to get the Internet. Instead, you decided to leave them to the avails of the market. The market is not large enough, and now we're forced to pay more to get less service.

Will you finally admit privatizing Ontera was a mistake?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Bill Mauro: There have been tremendous changes in the telecom industry, and it no longer made sense for ONTC to run a telecom company whose services are being provided more efficiently by private sector companies. The sale of Ontera is part of the government's strategic path forward. We've committed a

\$15-million investment that will be matched dollar for dollar by Bell and will result in a \$30-million update to fibre network systems and tower and system upgrades.

While there were short-term costs associated with the sale of Ontera, the costs of continued ownership—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Finish, please.

Hon. Bill Mauro: While there were short-term costs associated with the sale, the costs of continued ownership outweighed the short-term costs of the sale. Proceeds from the sale include \$6 million in cash and an estimated \$9 million in long-term revenue to the ONTC through a fibre licence agreement with Bell.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development. We've been seeing phenomenal reviews of *Come From Away*, a musical that made its debut on Broadway this month after being showcased here in Toronto. The musical tells a story of Canadians helping stranded American travellers in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Speaker, this show actually got its start here in Ontario with the collaboration of Sheridan College.

Could the minister please tell us more about this musical and how Sheridan was involved in bringing it to Broadway?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to have this question and this opportunity to highlight an extraordinary success from one of our colleges.

Last week, I was delighted to be in New York City to see *Come From Away* on Broadway. As the member said, it's about how the people of Gander, Newfoundland, came together to support people from all over the world as they landed there after 9/11. It has received fantastic critical acclaim; A-listers are going to see it—maybe none more famous than our very own Minister of Labour, Kevin Flynn, attending as well.

It is heartwarming. It is compelling. It's a show set in Canada, written by Canadians Irene Sankoff and David Hein. It was born and brought to life right here in Ontario through the Sheridan College Canadian Music Theatre Project. I'm delighted to talk more in my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

1140

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer. I think we're all quite envious of our labour minister for taking in the show. We're going to ask him all about it.

We should note that Sheridan works with the Canadian Music Theatre Project as a kind of musical theatre incubator. Canadian and international writers and composers can bring their new musicals to life through workshops and stage greetings, working with a cast of students.

Could the minister please tell us more on how students are involved in the creation of musicals like *Come From Away*?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Since 2011, the Canadian Music Theatre Project has workshopped 12 musicals this way. Led by Michael Rubinoff, students are involved from the very beginning, helping shape these pieces of art through each new stage of development. This is exactly the kind of hands-on, experiential learning we want all students to have, whether they're in engineering, whether they're in early childhood education or performance arts. Colleges have been leaders in integrating this type of high-impact opportunity for students right into their learning.

Next month, we'll be celebrating Colleges Week, a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Ontario's public college system, and there is a lot to celebrate. *Come From Away* is just one example where colleges are making our lives better here in Ontario and also bringing us pride on the world stage.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is to the Premier. Last week, I held my second rural and small-town poverty and jobs round table. One of the major topics at this meeting was the soaring hydro costs and how devastating they've been to people in small towns. I don't need to tell the Premier of Ontario that electricity rates have more than doubled in recent years, driving people into energy poverty, yet no action was taken until her popularity in the polls plummeted. Even then, her first step was to use taxpayers' money to create congratulatory ads.

Will the Premier explain why it is more important to put out a series of partisan political ads than it is to actually fix the hydro crisis that her government has created?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and talk about the Ontario fair hydro plan, which actually addresses the specific issues that concern many families that live in the rural or northern parts of our province, and because of that, we acted. The RRRP is going to be increased significantly for many of those customers who are R2 or R1 customers. They're going to see not just 25%, Mr. Speaker, like every other family and small business and farm in the province; they're actually going to see between 40% and 50% reductions for those folks who are in rural and northern parts of the province.

We're going to make sure that the RRRP is enhanced, we're making sure that distribution rates are fair for those folks who are in those parts of our province, and we will continue to bring forward other programs like the affordability fund that will also help those folks in that part of the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: One of the many attendees at my recent round table was Pastor Brian Horrobin of the First Baptist Church in Wallaceburg. Pastor Horrobin stated that Ontario's soaring electricity prices are emptying the charitable coffers of churches, which are being tapped by parishioners

unable to pay their power bills or afford groceries: another story of heat or eat here in Liberal Ontario.

Does the Premier think it's fair for people to rely on churches to cover basic necessities like heat, hydro and groceries in their communities, or does she simply not care about the people living in small towns in rural Ontario who are stuck paying their bills?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of poverty and housing.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to be able to follow up on the discussion around poverty in Ontario. I think it shows the leadership of this government in establishing a ministry that focuses on Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

I want to let you know that yesterday we tabled with the Legislature our Poverty Reduction Strategy report that announces that we've had a 20% reduction in child poverty in this province. I think that shows great leadership right across.

There's so much more that this province is doing when it comes to poverty reduction in general, whether it be things like the free tuition for students, the basic income pilot that we're offering, or the energy costs with some of the strategies that we're undertaking. By and large, Mr. Speaker, we're focused on poverty reduction.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. A local business, Border City Castings from Fort Erie, contacted our office regarding a recent hydro bill. It was \$12,000—yes, \$12,000. This local business actually used around \$1,000 in electricity, but between global adjustment charges, delivery charges and HST, the bill is \$12,000.

While I appreciate that there is an 8% discount to help businesses in Ontario, unfortunately, this business does not qualify for that reduction because of their kilowatts-per-hour usage. I believe this is unfair. The Liberal government should be concerned that businesses in Niagara and across Ontario are going to have to close because of these policies.

I ask the Premier: Will you commit to taking immediate action to help small and medium-sized businesses in Ontario with their crushing hydro bills by stopping the sale of Hydro One and taking real action to lower hydro bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's very important to note that the ICI program actually helps all businesses with under one megawatt of power usage by reducing their bills by up to one third. I don't know the specifics of that individual business. I'd be more than happy to talk with the honourable member about that to find out what programs they do qualify for. There are many, many programs that are out there.

I was at a great company in Brant called Hematite. We were there giving them an award. They saved \$200,000 by changing their lights. But do you know what? They

were unaware of the ICI program. We're working with them to actually help them save one third on their bills.

The way we've reduced this from one megawatt to 500 kilowatts: Thousands more small businesses and medium-sized enterprises will qualify for the ICI. That's great news for business in this province.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from London—Fanshawe on a point of order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to correct my record. Rather than 10 decades, it's only 10 years. But it feels like 10 decades.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members are always allowed to correct their record—without editorial.

DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ajax—Pickering on a point of order.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, I would like to, on behalf of all three parties, invite everyone here today to a special Down Syndrome Association of Ontario in committee room 228. That was under way three minutes ago and will be going for an hour and a half. We look forward to having you come in and join our hospitality.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You have my indulgence. That's not a point of order.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on a point of order.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. When I was responding to the question on hospital operating budgets, I referenced Hamilton Health Sciences. I had intended, in fact, to reference St. Joseph's Healthcare system, which received a \$15-million increase in operations last year—

Miss Monique Taylor: You did not. You went back to Hamilton Health Sciences—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's absolutely never too late to have someone asked to stop.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed till 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1148 to 1500.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener Centre: point of order.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm rising on a point of order, if I may. I would like to ask both for an apology from the member for Perth—Wellington and for him to withdraw

some sexist comments that he made during the Standing Committee on Government Agencies this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to inform the member that matters that happen in committee are first to be raised and dealt with by committee and, thereafter, if not dealt with, can be put to the House, but not before.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Nepean–Carleton has given notice of her dissatisfaction with an answer to her question given by the Minister of Energy concerning greenhouse energy. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COWBELL BREWING CO.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yesterday, we celebrated Ontario craft brewers here at Queen's Park, and today I'd like to recognize the great work being done by the Sparling family and their team at Cowbell Brewing Co.

The brewery, situated on 111 acres, boasts some top-notch environmental practices, including the very first ever North American carbon-neutral brewery. Again, Cowbell brewery is introducing North America's first-ever carbon-neutral aspect in terms of how they're going to brew their beer and how they're to manage their waste water. It's going to be a site that leads by example for the rest of Ontario.

In an article in the *Citizen*, Vice-President Grant Sparling said that with the brewery set to be located on the site of a former working farm—at Highway 4 on County Road 25, if you're in the Blyth area—"the Cowbell team was inspired by farmers as stewards of the land and the environment and the team knew they needed to keep that promise as well..."

In addition to the carbon neutrality, Cowbell has adopted state-of-the-art technologies that have allowed the brewery to cut its water consumption to half of the industry standard. The facility is in the process of being built and, once it's completed, the Sparlings are hoping to share their methods with other breweries that are looking to become more environmentally friendly.

I hope everyone had a chance yesterday evening at the Speakers' craft brewers reception to sample the great brews from Cowbell and check out the model of the brewery that's going to be finished by August 1.

DOWN SYNDROME

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm delighted to rise today to recognize World Down Syndrome Day and also to celebrate the first Ontario Down Syndrome Day.

First, I want to give a shout-out to the wonderful people of the Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton, who have gathered to celebrate this day in Hamilton and are watching the Legislature as we speak. This is a particularly special day for those in Hamilton because the idea for the Ontario Down Syndrome Day had its birth with Jennifer Crowson and Alyson Kowalchuk, the president and secretary of the Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton. I want to thank them for their vision on this day, and I want to thank the organization and the many others around the province for the incredible work that they do. It is my pleasure to join with them every day, but especially today, to celebrate people with Down syndrome, to help break down barriers, to encourage inclusion and to dispel the myths and stereotypes.

I have been blessed with opportunities to spend time with some of the most caring and fun-loving people, who, to this day, have to fight to have their abilities recognized. I'm proud to call them my friends, and I encourage everyone to, in the words of the Canadian Down Syndrome Society billboards, as they say, "See the Ability."

I'm sorry that I can't be with you today in Hamilton, but I look forward to continuing our work together in the future. Congratulations, and enjoy your day.

FAMILY DAY WALKATHON

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: The Mississauga Muslim community recently held its 7th annual Family Day Walkathon in support of the Trillium Health Partners Foundation.

Despite cold temperatures and, at times, bitter winds, the warmth created by the collective goodwill of those participating kept a smile on everyone's face. Having had the pleasure of attending the walkathon in previous years, that is the memory which always sticks with me the most.

We are proud of our Muslim community in Mississauga. It is important to note that the Mississauga Muslim community was one of the first to recognize Family Day and one of the first to ever organize a family program, which was the Family Day Walkathon. This was a charitable walkathon open to all members of Mississauga's diverse communities. The Mississauga Muslim community had a stated goal of raising a quarter-million dollars in five years. They were able to achieve this goal in just three years; this is remarkable. This money went directly into the expansion of the ER department at the Credit Valley Hospital.

This example of hard work and goodwill is what makes Ontario such an incredible place to live. Each and every person who participated in this effort must be saluted for their dedication, as it is individuals who come together who make stronger communities.

COLORECTAL CANCER

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased today to discuss National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, which is occurring in March. Colorectal cancer is the third most

common cancer and the second leading cause of death in Canada.

Colorectal cancer occurs when the cell linings in the colon or rectum become abnormal and develop into benign tumours, otherwise known as polyps. These polyps may undergo DNA changes and become cancerous. If left untreated, the cancer may spread into the blood, lymph vessels, liver and lungs. Diabetes, physical inactivity, obesity, consumption of red and processed meats, and smoking are risk factors related to colorectal cancer. Last year, one in 14 men and one in 16 women were diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

But there is hope. It is estimated that 68% of people survive a colorectal cancer diagnosis. However, early detection is key. If the cancer can be detected through early screening, it can be highly treatable. Early identification and removal of growths are key to preventing development of colorectal cancer. The most effective screening of colorectal cancer is the stool test. There are two types available in Canada: The fecal occult blood test and the fecal immunochemical test. If you're between the ages of 50 and 74 and not at high risk for colorectal cancer, you should take a stool test every two years. High-risk patients should see their family practitioner and arrange a colonoscopy.

I'd like to thank the Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada for all of their awareness, support and advocacy efforts. I encourage survivors, patients, caregivers and everyone who has been affected by the disease to get involved in the discussion and tell their story. Colorectal cancer can be prevented, it can be treated and it can be beaten.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I rise today to address a serious and growing problem that I hear about in my riding of London—Fanshawe and from seniors and families across the province. The problem is long-term care.

As the NDP critic for senior affairs, home and long-term care, I have held a town hall in my riding of London—Fanshawe. The meeting was very well attended. I heard from seniors, families and front-line health care workers, including PSWs around nurses, along with long-term-care administrators. It was heartbreaking to learn that not one person in that room was able to stand up and say that they felt their loved ones were receiving the kind of care they deserved. Everyone present felt that the Liberal cuts and their funding shortages have prevented long-term-care homes from being able to deliver the type of care that seniors now need.

Families and workers were united in their calls for better funding, recognizing that staff ratios and hours of care need to be improved. I also heard that the wait lists have gone up to more than 26,000 seniors waiting for care. That list is expected to double in six years to 50,000. I heard how families are slipping into poverty trying to care for their loved ones at home, and about the violence and abuse in long-term-care homes that don't have access to complex care and behavioural services.

Seniors' care is at a tipping point, and the Premier keeps squeezing health care and long-term-care dollars. The cuts have to stop because seniors deserve better care.

1510

MEALS ON WHEELS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: March is Meals on Wheels Month in Waterloo region. This is an organization performing important work in my community and right across the province of Ontario. Every day, they're enabling seniors and adults with disabilities to live at home with independence and dignity.

They extended an invitation to me to experience up close how they distribute lunches to over 300 people every day. So, I joined them, first to pack the food—on the menu last Wednesday was soup, spaghetti with meat sauce and fruit salad. After the lunches were packed up and ready to go, I joined long-time volunteers Elsie and John to make the deliveries. The recipients were very happy to receive their nutritious hot lunches. For some, we were the only human contact they'd had all week.

Last year, Meals on Wheels' volunteers delivered over 84,000 healthy homemade meals to people right across Waterloo region, including Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and North Dumfries.

This organization is always looking for volunteers to help prepare and deliver meals. For students who are looking to complete their volunteer hours, or adults and active seniors who have some spare time, I encourage them to volunteer with Meals on Wheels. Making a difference in someone's life and seeing first-hand the impact that your efforts have on those who benefit from the program was a very rewarding experience. So, if you have a free afternoon this month and throughout the year, I challenge you to contact your local Meals on Wheels and volunteer for a day.

APPLE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to show support for apple farmers in Ontario and share the results of a new study that highlights the tremendous economic benefit of the apple industry in our province. The apple industry generates \$634 million in economic activity every year. For every \$1 million in output, there's \$2.39 million of activity generated in the economy.

The industry contributes \$351.6 million to the provincial GDP every year. It supports over 5,100 full-time, direct and indirect jobs with associated wages and salaries of \$247.1 million, and this results in tax revenues of \$106.7 million annually to federal, provincial and municipal governments.

In addition, Ontario apple farmers currently supply only 45% of the Ontario fresh apple market. In fact, Ontario imports 80.6 million kilograms of apples for consumption every year. This means there is room for the Ontario industry to grow. According to this study, for every \$10 million in additional output, there's \$24.2

million generated in economic activity in the provincial economy. These are impressive numbers. They're impressive for not only my riding, which is apple-rich in the north end, but many parts of Ontario.

This new data reveals just how significant a role the apple industry plays and has the potential to play in Ontario. I would ask the government to review the study and do what is needed to support this important industry.

Finally, I would like to thank a local apple grower and past chair of the Ontario Apple Growers, Brian Gilroy, a friend of mine. I'd like to thank Brian for providing me with this information and keeping me informed and up to date on the industry.

COMMUNITY AWARDS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Today, I rise to share with my colleagues the names of some great citizens honoured through the Leading Women/Leading Girls Building Communities Recognition Program. The program recognizes women and girls for their volunteerism and civic leadership above and beyond their professional work.

I had the honour to present this year's certificates to Uzma Irfan, Lynne Mack, Aaloka Mehndiratta, Kiran Pothula and Tracy Liu in recognition of their exceptional community service and volunteer work. The Leading Girls category recognition recipients were Robyn Adamo, Jessica Ajose and Brooklyn Howard.

Mr. Speaker, our communities grow stronger when civic-minded people lend their talents and energy helping fellow citizens better their lives and achieve their goals.

It is especially important that women in diverse communities, such as my own riding of Mississauga-Brampton South, stand up for their communities and, through their example and spirit, inspire others to do the same.

I extend my warmest congratulations and deep thanks to these exemplary leading women and leading girls.

PAUL NICHOLLS

Mrs. Julia Munro: It is with both sadness and respect that I make a statement today in the Ontario Legislature on the passing of a friend of mine and a friend of our town of Georgina, Paul Nicholls. A former town councillor and Rogers TV host, Paul was a pillar of the Georgina community and a true community volunteer. Paul passed away last month while on vacation.

I always remember him at any of the elections, whether it was for municipal or provincial or federal—that he was always the moderator. Everyone took his leadership on those kinds of municipal opportunities that, of course, he would be the moderator. He was a very careful moderator as well, knowing that all the people outside in the audience were just as potentially critical as the ones who were contributing in the election debate.

He sat on the board of directors for both the Georgina Public Library and Georgina Cares. I always enjoyed the opportunity to appear on his show and to speak with him

on issues important to Georgina, both locally and provincially. I will remember him for his knowledge, wit and spirit of volunteerism.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated March 21, 2017, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I beg leave to present a report on Electricity Power System Planning (section 3.05, 2015 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario) from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table the committee's report today, entitled Electricity Power System Planning (section 3.05, 2015 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario).

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee at the time this report was written: Lisa MacLeod, Vice-Chair; Vic Dhillon; Han Dong; John Fraser; Percy Hatfield; Randy Hillier; Monte Kwinter and Arthur Potts.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of Energy and the Independent Electricity System Operator for their attendance at the hearings. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and staff in the Legislative Research Service.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Grant Crack: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): The committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 92, An Act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014 and make related amendments to other statutes / *Projet de loi 92, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2014 sur la négociation collective dans les conseils scolaires et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the standing order of the House dated March 2, 2017, the bill is ordered for third reading.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's an honour to rise in the House today on this special day to recognize United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Before I begin, I'd like to recognize Chika Oriuwa, who is in the members' gallery today. She is a brilliant young woman who is a medical student at the University of Toronto. I have to say this: She's the only black medical student, first year, at the University of Toronto, out of 259 students. There was a great article written about her recently in the *Toronto Star*, so please pick it up. Welcome to the Legislature.

This day was established by the United Nations General Assembly following the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa on March 21, 1960, when 69 people were killed for peacefully protesting. This day calls on the international community, people from around the world and here in Ontario, to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and to commemorate the lives that have been lost in the fight for democracy and equal rights.

1520

This year's theme is, "Racial profiling and incitement to hatred, including in the context of migration." How appropriate, Mr. Speaker, when we consider what's happening in our own backyard. I've spent the last year, as the minister responsible for anti-racism, going throughout this province, having conversations with thousands of people about the devastating social, economic and psychological impacts of racial profiling. Like many here today and across the province, racial profiling is something that hurts many of us in Ontario. In fact, being from the black community, I myself have been stopped and asked for my identification for just innocently walking down the street. It's really a humiliating thing to go through.

This year's theme also addresses the reaction to the global migration that we saw last year around the world. Here in Ontario, we've opened our doors, Mr. Speaker, as we always have, to many people from around the world—many immigrants coming into Canada, coming into Ontario to build a better life. In Ontario, we have over 200 nations, including people who have come from faraway places like Syria, which we've seen more recently in the news. And sadly, at this time, we have seen a small but very loud minority inciting hatred towards our newest neighbours through Islamophobic anti-Muslim acts and protests, making this year's focus on hatred in the context of migration especially important.

We have also seen hatred through violent acts across our province and across this great country. Mr. Speaker, I don't have to go through the long list of different things that have happened in this province and in this country over the last few years—a heightened awareness around hate. We've seen hatred and racist acts take place within indigenous communities. In fact, just last week, or a week and a half ago, we had bomb threats to Jewish community centres, where we know families and children attend. This is unacceptable in our Ontario; it's unacceptable here in Canada.

I stand by what I said when I rose in this House during Black History Month to formally recognize the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent just weeks ago. Discrimination against even one of our citizens, Mr. Speaker, hurts our entire society. Too many of our communities and citizens today are still victimized by racism. This is our responsibility, as friends here in this Legislature, as colleagues, as neighbours to recognize this problem and have the courage to take action, the courage to stand up and say "No more," the courage to take proactive steps to eliminate the causes of racial discrimination. We need to look at ourselves and take responsibility for how our words, how our actions, either consciously or subconsciously, contribute to racism and how we can do a better job.

This is why our government, this is why our Premier set up the Anti-Racism Directorate: to tackle systemic racism in large institutions and look for ways to combat racism in our communities. Systemic racism is an inexcusable barrier facing indigenous, black and racialized groups from all across our province.

Two weeks ago, I introduced a new strategic plan for Ontario, a three-year plan called *A Better Way Forward*. It outlines the steps that we are taking to combat systemic racism and to build an anti-racism approach in the way our government develops policies, makes decisions and measures success. This plan is a road map for removing barriers to success that are caused by systemic racism. We want to build a fair and inclusive Ontario where every single person has the opportunity to reach their full potential. Our strategy, Mr. Speaker, is based on past reports and recommendations, recommendations like the Curling report that came out, *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*.

I also want to just take a moment to recognize all of the people in the history of this province who have

worked to fight for civil rights. It crosses party lines; it crosses different institutions—different people within society. I just want to take a minute to recognize the men and women who have fought tirelessly to fight systemic racism here in the province of Ontario to build the type of environment that allows me to stand here today, Mr. Speaker, and freely speak about the ill effects of racism and to have the opportunity to take on a position to continue to fight racism.

It is also informed by people I met in the communities, in meetings, while travelling across the province between June and December of last year. I met with parents and teachers, community workers, youth and many other concerned individuals from all walks of life who came forward to share their stories about how racism impacts their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the hurt and the frustration and the anger from people in this province, and there is no excuse. Racism hurts, and it's unacceptable. But it's here, and for that reason we've created this strategy to move forward.

We're looking at ways to change the narrative, to change the outcomes, to change people's perception on what racism means to people.

We're going to strengthen policy, research and evaluation by collecting better race-based, disaggregated data that can be broken down so we can monitor the impact of policies and programs on different segments of our population. Too much of our data to quantify the impact of racism is more than a decade old. This will help us identify where change is needed to address disparities and disproportional outcomes.

We will also develop a method for applying an anti-racism perspective to decision-making at the early stages.

Secondly, we will introduce anti-racism legislation here in this House that, if passed, would ensure future sustainability and accountability for our work. Our government is committed to transparency. We want to share the progress of the initiatives and targets in this plan through an annual progress report so everyone in this province can know and see exactly what this government is doing when it comes to ending systemic racism.

Third, we want to develop and lead targeted public education and awareness initiatives, where we'll focus on anti-black racism, anti-indigenous racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of racism that affect racialized groups.

Finally, we will work closely with indigenous and racialized communities, ministry partners and government institutions, because eliminating systemic racism cannot be achieved alone.

Our strategic plan has population-specific initiatives, particularly to address racism experienced by indigenous people, anti-black racism, racism within the Ontario public service, as well as Islamophobia.

As part of our commitment to address anti-black racism, I introduced the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan, because we've reached a critical point with anti-black racism in this province that we must address. For

too many years, this province has failed our youth. We've not done enough to support them through their education, at home, at school, in the workplace and in the health care system.

Enough is enough, when it comes to certain groups within our communities that don't feel as though they're getting support from governments and past governments. As a government, we're ready to take responsibility to make those types of changes.

The black youth action plan comes with a four-year funding commitment of \$47 million, and it will serve approximately 11,000 children each year. This investment, Mr. Speaker—and I think it's an investment that we can all be proud of—is the single largest investment into the lives of black youth and children in the province's history. I think it's a milestone that we can be very proud of.

This plan will help eliminate disparities between black youth and non-black youth within homes and classrooms, in the journey towards post-secondary education, in youth justice and in the workforce. When we invest in our black youth, we invest into the future of this province.

In closing, I want to thank all the members who have been involved. It has been members from our side, I know—and from the opposition side, we had members come out to our consultations to provide input. I want to thank everyone in this House for contributing to this plan and working with us to engage the citizens of Ontario, to build a plan that we can be proud of, as Ontarians, through a three-year strategic plan, but also a plan within that plan that focuses on anti-indigenous racism, that focuses on anti-black racism, that focuses on all forms of racism here in the province of Ontario, so that we can continue what we do best in Ontario: to make this province the best place it could possibly be and allow people to reach their full potential.

1530

NOWRUZ

Hon. Reza Moridi: Yesterday at 6:28 a.m., the vernal equinox marked the arrival of spring in eastern Canada as well as the beginning of Nowruz celebrations. Mr. Speaker, Eyedetun Mubarak; to the members of this House, Sale no Mubarak.

As many of you may remember, in April 2008 this House unanimously supported my motion proclaiming the first day of spring Nowruz in Ontario. A year later, the House of Commons passed a similar motion proclaiming the first day of spring Nowruz in Canada. As such, Canada became the first country in the Western world to proclaim a day for Nowruz. Two years later, in 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution that March 21 would be recognized as the International Day of Nowruz.

I must thank the leadership of Premier Kathleen Wynne for her support of the Iranian community and for her participation in the fire festivals in Richmond Hill and Willowdale last Tuesday.

It is my wish today to recognize many hard-working Iranian Canadians proudly serving our country. They are members of the House of Commons, the National Assembly of Quebec, a member of this House, cabinet ministers and public servants; they are professors, researchers and students in academia; they are nurses, doctors, dentists, electricians, lawyers, carpenters, engineers, plumbers and accountants; they are our small and large business owners and many more.

It is my privilege to stand in this House today and to say Har Ruz etan Nowrouz, Nowruz etan Pyrouz.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to add my views on behalf of Patrick Brown and the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

I've only recently been appointed the critic for the Anti-Racism Secretariat, and I must say, in my 11 years here—this year—this happens to be one of my favourite postings and portfolios that I've been given. It's because I think that there is a lot of good work that we can do as a province and as legislators in order to bring our communities together.

Canada is a very diverse nation, as we all know. In recent weeks, I've spent some time with those who work with immigrants in our city of Ottawa, and I was pleased to learn that, in Ontario, 60% of our population is either first-generation or second-generation Canadian. In my city of Ottawa, 25% of the nation's capital now comes from someplace else, but they always find a home here.

As we start to see an increasingly diverse population, sometimes we have people who are a bit more afraid. They may act out and they may hurt other people through their words or their actions. That's why it's up to all of us to step up.

Yesterday, I brought together multi-faith leaders in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as members from our indigenous, Indo-Canadian, Chinese and Italian communities to have a day for humanity, acceptance and inclusion. We had wonderful presentations and we had good speeches. Imam Delic of the South Nepean Muslim Community stood and gave the keynote address at the synagogue. We had workshops that challenged and tested us to see beyond colour, to see beyond race, to see beyond ethnicity. We challenged each other to look at each other for who we are: as neighbours.

That's why as a neighbour I'm standing here today to condemn the hate we've seen recently in Canada, whether that's swastikas at our synagogues, whether that is anti-Muslim bigotry that we're seeing sometimes on message boards, or whether that's the use of the N-word at a little girl's hockey game. We all have a role to play. I

think we can do it in a positive way and in a way that challenges not only our perceptions of each other, but of ourselves.

NOWRUZ

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm proud to rise on behalf of Patrick Brown and the PC caucus on the celebration of Nowruz. Across all cultures, spring is a symbol of rebirth, renewal and hope. For over 300 years, the holiday of Nowruz has coincided with the spring equinox and offered people around the world, including Ontario, the opportunity to gather with friends and loved ones to celebrate.

Nowruz embodies more than just a rich historic and cultural heritage, tracing its roots back to the very foundations of the Zoroastrian belief. It is a celebration that unites people across ethnic, language, cultural, national and religious lines. It is a public holiday in many countries across central Asia. Nowruz also brings together people of different faiths and confessions, including the Baha'is, the Sunnis, the Shias, Ismailis and Zoroastrians and people of other faiths living in other countries where Nowruz is celebrated.

Since 2010, through a jointly filed resolution, Nowruz has been included in the United Nations Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It is a tradition that we should experience, treasure and preserve for future generations, as it lives not in stone or on paper but in our hearts, minds and communities.

In the words of UNESCO's director general, "At a time when violent extremism seeks to destroy diversity and freedoms, Nowruz is a reminder of the power of culture and heritage to build resilient and sustainable societies."

As Ontarians of many cultures and origins come together to celebrate, it is my pleasure to convey to them this House's and the PC caucus's warmest and fondest wishes of Nowruz Mubarak—to have a blessed Nowruz.

NOWRUZ

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to rise today on behalf of the NDP caucus and all New Democrats to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. But I'd like to start by taking a moment to wish health, prosperity and happiness to all Ontarians celebrating Nowruz today: Nowruz Mubarak. Persian New Year is the celebration that we're talking about. It is a welcoming of spring. It's an annual tradition that celebrates the renewal of nature. It is a time for families to get together to celebrate family traditions, culture and heritage and to visit with neighbours.

Ontario continues to be enriched every day by its Persian, central Asian, Kurdish and Ismaili communities. So to them, I say thank you and happy Nowruz.

I think Nowruz is an especially timely celebration in Ontario right now because, while it is about the renewal of spring and the new year, it is also a time to embrace

and promote the values of peace, solidarity and reconciliation. But sometimes, it feels like those values are under attack here in Ontario.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a province built on the values of diversity and inclusion. Our greatest strength, of course, as we all say often, is our diversity in culture, faith, language and heritage. But lately, that diversity and inclusiveness is being threatened more and more.

Every day, it feels like we hear new reports of anti-black, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-indigenous attacks. Let's be clear and unwavering in our conviction that racism and prejudice has no place in Ontario or Canada.

I know my caucus colleagues and all members of this House are doing what we can to help, and we have done some good work. Just last month, it was my privilege to stand and speak in favour of the recent motion, supported by all parties, condemning Islamophobia in Ontario.

My caucus colleagues and I were proud to join leaders and activists in communities across this province to call for the establishment of the Anti-Racism Directorate here in Ontario.

This past October, the member from London-Fanshawe put forward a bill to declare October Islamic Heritage Month across Ontario. I've recently introduced a motion calling on the government to declare Ontario a sanctuary province.

Unfortunately, for many hard-working Ontarians, motions we pass here have very little impact on their day-to-day lives. The reality is that public spaces, houses of worship and people's homes are being vandalized in cities across this province. People of all ages are being threatened and assaulted for the colour of their skin or their perceived heritage. Muslim women are afraid to walk home, fearful that they might have their hijab ripped off, or worse. Many families are beginning to wonder just how they can raise their children here.

Today, on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, New Democrats stand with Ontarians to condemn this hateful behaviour and to reaffirm our caucus's commitment to end racism and prejudice in all its forms. We must always stand up against prejudice and hate, whenever and wherever we see it. That is our obligation and our responsibility, as opposed to just words. We must take action.

1540

The Ontario that we love and believe in is being threatened. We have to do something about it. Thankfully, I know we're not alone in this struggle. For every closed-minded, fearful person spreading hate in Ontario, there are hundreds of civic-minded, loving Ontarians pushing back. I will always be grateful for the amazing work that people are doing to strengthen and support the diversity of our province.

This coming weekend, I look forward to speaking at the J.S. Woodsworth Awards, an annual event where community activists and leaders come together to celebrate and honour Ontarians who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and commitment to human rights, equity, and the fight to end racial discrimination.

I think those celebrations are absolutely vital to moving forward. While we must always be vigilant and outspoken in the face of hatred, discrimination and prejudice, we should also take the time to celebrate the Ontarians who are fighting alongside us every day to make Ontario a more welcoming and safe province for all Ontarians.

Across party lines, we are here because we love Ontario, and we believe in what Ontario can be for everyone. So let's be strong and unafraid. Let's make sure that every child feels they belong here.

Today and every day, let's stand up against racism, prejudice and hate, whenever and wherever we see it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

MEMBERS' ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank Dan Gilbert and Dr. Kamila Premji-Gilbert. They've designed this petition, and it has been certified by the table.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario members of the Legislative Assembly are elected by the people of Ontario, to serve the people of Ontario;

"Whereas Ontario citizens sometimes face difficulties engaging elected representatives in meaningful dialogue, receiving either no reply or form-letter replies to their letters, emails and phone calls;

"Whereas Ontario citizens expect and deserve timely responses to the concerns they bring to the attention of their elected representatives;

"Whereas Ontario citizens expect and deserve direct answers to questions posed to their elected representatives;

"Whereas Ontario citizens are frustrated by repeated examples of 'cash for access' to elected representatives;

"Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario currently does not have any regulations in place to ensure accountability to its constituents outside of elections;

"Whereas such lack of accountability to constituents is a fundamental subversion of the principles of democracy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that elected members of the Legislative Assembly have a responsibility to respond in a timely and meaningful fashion to constituents, and will take action now to:

“(1) Set reasonable timelines for responding to constituents;

“(2) Respond directly to questions and comments posed by constituents; and

“(3) Make this data publicly available as a quality assurance indicator for each MPP.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature, and I’ll send it to the table with page Rajeev.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a long one, but I have edited it for time. It’s on energy poverty.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, our hydro rates have tripled since Conservative governments started privatizing our electricity system, and since Premier Wynne took office less than four years ago, peak hydro rates have increased by more than 50% ... 10 times faster than inflation; and

“Whereas the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has reported” skyrocketing numbers of hydro accounts in arrears and in Windsor this increase in arrears has tripled to more than 6,000 accounts; and

“Whereas the Ontario Chamber of Commerce” claims that one in 20 businesses will shut down “in the next five years due to rising energy costs; and ...

“Whereas the Minister of Energy has the power under the Ontario Energy Board Act to issue directives to the OEB with respect to fees and pricing”, especially if it pertains to “fairness, efficiency and transparency”...;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To take immediate and tangible steps to reduce the costs of energy ... ” taking into account the needs of low-income families and small businesses, since high hydro costs are driving them into energy poverty, and, finally, to stop the sale of Hydro One.

Speaker, I agree. I’ll pass it up with Nicholas to the table officers.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Arthur Potts: Another very carefully crafted petition from concerned citizens of the province of Ontario. This one reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

“Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between the Waterloo region and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

“Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge.”

I certainly agree with this petition, sign it, and leave it with page Sophie.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas a staff report has recommended Upper Canada District School Board close numerous schools across eastern Ontario; and

“Whereas access to quality local education is essential for rural communities to thrive; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education removed community impact considerations from pupil accommodation review guidelines in 2015 and has cut essential rural school funding; and

“Whereas local communities treasure their public schools and have been active participants in their continued operation, maintenance and success; and

“Whereas the Ontario government should focus on delivering quality, local education services to all communities, including rural Ontario; and

“Whereas the current PAR process forces bad behaviour by school boards to justify the replacement of high-maintenance outdated schools;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) to support” my “motion to suspend all current PAR reviews until a strategic rural education plan is completed, engaging all rural school boards, school communities and municipalities;

“(2) to reinstate considerations of value to the local community and value to the local economy in pupil accommodation review guidelines; and

“(3) to engage all rural school boards, including the Upper Canada District School Board, school communities and municipalities in the development of the strategic rural education plan; and

“(4) consider rural education opportunities, student bus times, accessible extracurricular and inter-school activities, the schools’ role as a community hub and its value to the local economy.”

I agree with this and will pass it off to page Franny.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

M^{me} France G  linas: I have this petition that comes from all over the northeast. I want to thank Jo-Anne Kingston from Chelmsford in my riding for signing this petition, which reads as follows:

"Whereas the residents of northern Ontario, particularly people who are sick or elderly, depend on public transportation for appointments in southern Ontario;

"Whereas intercity bus routes have been eliminated by Greyhound, for example, all daytime routes between Sudbury and Ottawa;....

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to: Ensure that Ontario Northland offers adequate and equitable intercity transportation service from northern to southern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and give it to the page.

SOINS DE SANTÉ PRIMAIRES

The Acting Chair (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further petitions? The member from Prescott-South Glengarry. Did I get it right?

Mr. Grant Crack: Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

M. Grant Crack: Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président. J'ai une pétition à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario.

« Attendu que le gouvernement de l'Ontario doit renforcer les soins primaires comme le fondement du système de santé afin d'accomplir les objectifs transformatifs du projet Priorité aux patients; et

« Attendu que les recherches démontrent que la collaboration interprofessionnelle en soins primaires offre de meilleurs résultats pour la santé des personnes et un meilleur rapport qualité-prix; et

« Attendu qu'un investissement dans les soins primaires aidera à relever les défis associés au recrutement et à la rétention et consolider les équipes travaillant en collaboration interprofessionnelle pour la livraison des services de soins de santé primaires de haute qualité, axés sur la personne; et

« Attendu que plus de 7 500 personnes employées dans plus de 400 centres de santé communautaire, équipes de santé familiale, centres d'accès aux services de santé pour les autochtones et cliniques dirigées par du personnel infirmier praticien sont rémunérées à des taux inférieurs aux recommandations formulées en 2012, et, par conséquent, font face à des obstacles dans le recrutement et la rétention des fournisseurs de services de santé, ci-inclus le personnel infirmier praticien, les diététistes, les infirmières autorisées, les promoteurs en santé et les gestionnaires;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de s'engager à investir dans les équipes de collaboration interprofessionnelle en soins de santé primaires le montant de 130 millions de dollars annualisé au cours des deux prochaines années pour soutenir l'efficacité du recrutement et de la rétention en soins primaires. »

Je mets ma signature sur la pétition—

Le Président suppléant (M. Rick Nicholls): Juste à temps. Merci.

Further petitions?

1550

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office;

"Whereas over half of Ontarians' power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment;

"Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss;

"Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government's lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount;

"Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating;

"Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

"Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians' electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians' energy bills."

I agree with this and pass it to page—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further petitions?

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas once you privatize hydro, there's no return; and

"We'll lose billions in reliable ... revenues for schools and hospitals; and

"We'll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

"We'll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what's happened elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come."

I agree, Speaker, and—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further petitions?

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: "Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer's disease; and

"Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

"Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

"—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

"—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

"—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario."

I agree with this, affix my name and give it to page Zara.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario drivers aged 80 and over must complete group education sessions, driver record reviews, vision tests and non-computerized in-class assessment in order to renew their licences; and

"Whereas in Cornwall and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry classes have been cancelled without notice due to staff shortages; and

"Whereas seniors are forced to drive needlessly and wait at offices for temporary licences, which is neither productive nor fair to clients; and

"Whereas seniors in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry who require a functional assessment must drive to Ottawa or Smiths Falls and complete driving tests in a stressful and unfamiliar environment; and

"Whereas it is the government's duty to serve Ontario residents locally and conveniently;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) To deliver group education sessions and assessments on a walk-in basis at an existing facility such as the Cornwall DriveTest Centre; and

"(2) To take immediate steps to bring local delivery of functional assessment services to Cornwall and the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry."

I agree with this, pass it up with page—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further petitions?

PRIX DE L'ESSENCE

M. Michael Mantha: « À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Alors que les automobilistes du nord de l'Ontario continuent d'être soumis à des fluctuations marquées dans le prix de l'essence; et

« Alors que la province pourrait éliminer les prix abusifs et opportunistes et offrir des prix justes, stables et prévisibles; et

« Alors que cinq provinces et de nombreux états américains ont déjà une réglementation des prix d'essence; et

« Considérant que les juridictions qui réglementent le prix de l'essence ont : moins de fluctuations des prix, moins d'écarts de prix entre les communautés urbaines et rurales et des prix d'essence annualisés inférieurs;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« D'accorder à la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario le mandat de surveiller le prix de l'essence partout en Ontario afin de réduire la volatilité des prix et les différences de prix régionales, tout en encourageant la concurrence. »

Je suis complètement d'accord avec cette pétition. Je la présente au page Joshua pour l'apporter à la table des greffiers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MODERNIZING ONTARIO'S MUNICIPAL LEGISLATION ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA MODERNISATION DE LA LÉGISLATION MUNICIPALE ONTARIENNE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 8, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to say a few words about Bill 68, Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act. Like my colleagues before me, a lot has been said about the need to modernize the way that municipalities can do their work. Right now there are a number of issues—I would even say problems—that need to be addressed. The municipalities do get together: We have FONOM; we have NOMA; we have a number of organizations of municipalities that come to see each and every one of us.

They have come to see me, although I think I'm the only one of the 107 MPPs here who has very few municipalities. My riding is the riding of Nickel Belt. I have 33 little communities. Some of them are in and around Sudbury, but the riding of Sudbury is a riding of its own. The riding of Sudbury has the council of Sudbury. Some of the residents of Sudbury live in my riding, but the town itself is its own riding.

In the south part of my riding, for Alban, they are part of the municipality of French River. In the rest of my riding, the communities are so small that they don't have a municipal council. They are not affected by any of the laws that have to do with the changes to municipal legislation simply because they are too small.

1600

If you look at Ivanhoe or Foleyet, they have a local services board that kind of acts like a municipal council, but is not under the same laws and regulations. Then we have Mattagami. Mattagami is a First Nation. Here again, they are in charge of their First Nations community, but they don't fall under this bill. Then comes Gogama. Gogama is a community on its own, but it doesn't have a municipal council. They have a local services board. Then we look at Biscotasing, Westree, Shining Tree: None of those are big enough to have a municipal council. If you come down Highway 144, you will get to Geneva Lake; you'll get to Cartier.

Anyway, you get the idea, Speaker, that not everybody lives within a municipality. But still, municipalities do have a close relationship with Queen's Park. We do legislate a lot of the things that they can and cannot do, and they have come to us asking us to do changes.

One of the changes that is in the bill has to do with the integrity commissioner and, basically, the integrity commissioner will have power over the different councils. It's sort of weird, because in the bill, municipal councillors who are under the careful eye of the integrity commissioner will still control how much oversight the integrity commissioner will have over council. Most of the time, when the integrity commissioner comes to your council, it's because you could have done better. We have a bill here that could have left it to the integrity commissioner to decide how much oversight needs to be applied to the different municipalities to make sure that,

basically, taxpayers, at the end of the day, know that the business is being conducted the way it is, but the bill does not go there. The bill leaves it to the municipal councillors to decide. It leaves me with a question as to why would a municipal council willingly give a watchdog more oversight over them? It goes against human nature.

All of us here, all 107 MPPs, are under the integrity commissioner. We basically learn to respect the rules and learn to know that we live under this watchdog because it is for the good of our constituents and the good of our province. Here, we had a chance with this bill to set how much authority the integrity commissioner would have, but we left that to the council itself, which is sort of weird.

It's the same thing when it came to the Auditor General. The Auditor General is somebody who basically makes sure that the taxpayer gets value for money. They know their way along the ledger, and bookkeeping. They make sure that the expenses that are incurred and the contracts that are signed give value for money to the taxpayers.

Well, it is rather interesting that although the Auditor General will be allowed to do investigations of value-for-money audits within the municipal council, they are not allowed to initiate their own investigation. This is sort of weird, because the way it works is that the Auditor General will do a set of regular audits every year. Through their audits, best practices come out and good deeds come out, and sometimes, areas where taxpayers did not get good value for their money also come out, and people get to learn from that.

Through the changes that we're doing through modernizing Ontario's municipal legislation, although the Auditor General will be allowed, they won't be allowed to initiate investigations without council approval. I'm not putting bad intentions to councils, but I can see why a council would not want to have the team of the Auditor General descend upon their financial department and ask for information on all of this. At the end of the day, if they only invite the Auditor General for files as they see fit, I can see that the full value of what an Auditor General's report could do for our municipalities is sort of being lost in there.

The sum of the other parts that are not in the bill or only partly in the bill so that there are no major changes with respect to new municipal revenue tools: We know that here in Toronto, where the Legislative Assembly is, the city of Toronto has tools such as a hotel tax. There are other municipalities in Ontario who receive a lot of tourists and have a lot of hotels. Not all of them would want to have a hotel tax, but they certainly would like to at least have the legislation in place to do this. The city of Toronto formally requested that in December 2016. Bill 68 does not even give other municipalities the same revenue tools that Toronto has. This has been a long-standing request with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

I see that my time will quickly come to an end. There are big issues with our municipalities, big issues when

you look at maintaining a huge infrastructure. I can speak for the city of Greater Sudbury. The city of Greater Sudbury is huge. Since it's the city of Greater Sudbury, it's even bigger. The infrastructure and maintenance costs are astronomical, not to mention the winter maintenance cost of those roads and everything else. We have an opportunity that nobody else has because of all the minerals we have and all of the big mining companies we have.

Did you know that Sudbury doesn't benefit from having all of those big mining giants making billions of dollars off of our natural resources? It's because most of them have moved their offices and stuff underground so they are not taxed on the municipal tax base. It would be nice to give municipalities a little bit of flexibility so that could be achieved.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act. Since the Liberals were elected in 2003, we've worked very hard to improve the provincial-municipal relationship. I know that the mayor of Barrie, Jeff Lehman, and Barrie city council appreciate our direction.

The previous PC government downloaded billions of dollars in costs onto the backs of municipalities and residential property taxpayers. We have uploaded costs back to the province, giving municipalities more room in their budget to invest in local priorities.

In 2017, municipalities are benefiting from over \$4 billion in ongoing provincial support, including:

- uploads: nearly \$2 billion this year;
- the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund: \$505 million in unconditional support to municipalities, primarily rural and northern municipalities;
- the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which is \$100 million a year, which will increase to \$300 million a year in 2018-19; and
- transit funding: \$334.5 million to 99 municipalities, including many small, rural and northern communities through the provincial gas tax fund.

1610

The upload and the OMPF benefits are the equivalent of 13% of municipal property tax revenue in Ontario in 2017.

We have taken significant financial pressures off of municipal governments and residential taxpayers since forming government. This legislation would build on that support by modernizing the municipal legislative framework so that local governments could better respond to the needs of their constituents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's an honour to join in the debate on Bill 68, but as we discuss municipal government, my thoughts are with the family and friends of two municipal leaders we recently lost in Leeds-Grenville.

On March 10, Rideau Lakes township councillor Doug Good lost his life when the vehicle he was in went

through the ice on Big Rideau Lake. The tragic incident also claimed the life of his friend and an amazing citizen, Mike Carty. A first-term councillor, Doug was a well-known community champion long before he was elected in 2014. As Rideau Lakes' mayor, Ron Holman, observed, "He knew the area and knew everybody in the area, that's for sure. And everybody knew Doug." Doug loved Rideau Lakes and his hometown of Portland, and woke up every day dedicated to making it a better place to live and visit.

On March 14, my dear friend and former Gananoque mayor, Sylvia Thomas, passed away suddenly at age 68. Sylvia was mayor for two terms, from 1998 to 2003, and was an incredible fighter for Gananoque and its residents. Her vision and determination saw the Thousand Islands casino project completed, and it stands today as a vital part of our region's economy.

I want to join everyone in Leeds-Grenville in mourning these leaders who gave so much of themselves to improve our communities. I want to say to Doug's wife, Chris, and Sylvia's husband, Hector, and also to the Carty family that I mentioned earlier, for Mike and to all the families, I offer my heartfelt condolences. I appreciate members allowing me, in this municipal debate, to bring tribute to these two wonderful people in our riding. I want to thank you, Speaker, for giving me this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Leeds-Grenville. Of course, on behalf of all members here in the Ontario Legislature, our condolences go out to their families.

Further questions and comments? The member from Manitoulin—Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You're having problems with that one today, eh, Mr. Speaker? Algoma-Manitoulin: Follow the alphabet, A to M, and you'll get it right every time.

It's always a pleasure to stand in my place on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin and, particularly, on this bill, because some of the communities that I've had the privilege of representing have been asking for greater engagement, an opportunity for further scrutiny and an opportunity to have the ability to question decisions that are being made at municipal levels.

This may provide them with a little bit of relief. But when you look at the actual bill, it begs the question what exactly is happening here, because there's really no meat behind the actions that this bill is supposed to be creating. When we're looking at, really, establishing a code of conduct, that's a given. We absolutely want to see that happen because we want to know that process where, if there is a questionable item that is coming up, an individual would have that ethic of removing themselves from that decision. That's one of the issues that has come up time and time again across many of the communities and from the concerned citizens across my riding.

The implementation of the integrity commissioner and his role through this process—fantastic. It may create further transparency, but it's not a must; it's not some-

thing that has to happen under this bill. That's something that a lot of my constituents have been asking for because they want to have that go-to person. If they have an issue where there is maybe some friction between certain councillors within the community, they want to have that person that they can go to and trust, where they can get really good, independent thought-out ideas as far as: Was it right, what they did, or was it wrong?

Again, I ask, where is the meat in this bill?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I too want to join my colleague from Leeds–Grenville to express our sincere thoughts with the family. Being a former municipal politician, I know the role they play, so thank you for bringing that to the House. I think we all share your sentiments to the family.

Speaker, in the very little time I have, I want to, as part of my comments, focus on the role of the integrity commissioner in the move forward when this legislation becomes a reality. Through Bill 68, we are proposing that every municipality have a code of conduct and provide access to an integrity commissioner. I know, for people like myself who come from small, rural communities, that's an added pressure on municipalities, but we're saying to join forces with your neighbouring municipalities, because we know they don't need an integrity commissioner on a 24/7 basis.

Why are we doing this? Well, it was a recommendation from the Ombudsman of the province of Ontario back in 2015-16 in his annual report. Frankly, in most cases, there is no need for an ombudsman, but there are circumstances. I've seen that, within the municipality that I have the pleasure of representing, there's a bit of disconnect, maybe a little bit of disagreement over the council vision and the public vision. We need to respect municipal politicians who are duly elected in a democratic way. I think this will provide, in the long term, some relief even to council, because then they'll have an outside commissioner trying to be that arbitrator in between, so it's not that it will slant.

I hope we all agree that this needs to move forward, and I look forward to passing this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Nickel Belt for final comments.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank the member from Leeds–Grenville for the touching memorial he gave to the two municipal councillors—they are people who work hard and who certainly deserve to be honoured in this House—the member from Barrie, my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin and the member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Certainly this takes a small step in the direction of municipal legislation, but the big issues are still there. The biggest issue right now is municipal finances. I come from the city of Greater Sudbury. Everybody knows I represent Nickel Belt. Everybody knows that the nickel mines are there. Every day we have thousands of trucks loaded with thousands of tonnes of ore and slurry that go

down our roads, and at this time of the year, where the road thaws during the day and freezes at night, those trucks just destroy all of our roads. But it is the municipality that has to pay for them, although they don't get any money from the mining giants. The municipality can only tax the surface buildings. Sure, the administration of the big mining companies are on the surface, but everything else—all of their garages, all of their mechanics—is underground, and therefore not taxed.

There's a report called A Refined Argument—which was done when John Rodriguez was mayor of Sudbury—by the big five northern municipalities. They asked for new revenue tools specific to a resource town like Sudbury. But here again, this opportunity to fix municipal finances and to fix the conflict of interest was missed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 68. I will share my time with the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, this legislation that we're proposing will be updating a number of legislative frameworks for municipalities. If passed, the act would update the Municipal Act, the City of Toronto Act and the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, as well as other acts.

As a member from the city of Toronto, I'm very pleased to see that this act, if passed, will ensure that the city of Toronto must review their legislation every five years, which is very, very important in terms of the City of Toronto Act.

1620

We also know that there's a big component—and I heard this afternoon from my colleague opposite about the whole issue of the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act. I want to spend some time—a short moment—in the debate about the role of the integrity commissioner. Through Bill 68, we are proposing that every municipality have a code of conduct and to provide access to an integrity commissioner.

We don't have to go far, Mr. Speaker. For the last couple of months, we've been hearing concerns raised at the York Region District School Board. Everybody heard about those concerns.

At the same time, we also wanted to listen to what was written by the Ontario Ombudsman. In the 2015-16 annual report, he reported that “we encourage all municipalities to have strong and accessible processes to deal with complaints and appeals, and to establish local accountability officers such as integrity commissioners, auditors general and ombudsmen.” So if this legislation is passed, we will ensure that there will be a consistent level of accountability at the lower level of government.

Furthermore, the legislation also allows municipalities to pool their resources to share the integrity commissioners, because we recognize that there are small, rural towns that may not have the ability, in terms of finances, to pay for a full-time integrity commissioner.

The other piece of legislation I want to address is the fact that my colleague the member from Kitchener

Centre spoke so eloquently about her private member's bill, Bill 46, about parental leave. You know, Mr. Speaker, that this year marks the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. Every member in this chamber wants more women's representation—not just in this chamber, but in all levels of government. If this legislation is passed, the legislation will ensure that every member of municipal council will have time off for parental or pregnancy leave, so the offices of the members of council would not become vacant because a member needed to take time off to look after their young one. And for members who have to adopt a child: They get time off.

This is what the member from Kitchener Centre was talking about in her private member's bill: We want to encourage more women in all levels of government. Right now, as it stands, potentially, if a city councillor or the school board trustee does not have a parental leave opportunity, they can be asked to leave and vacate their seat. There's no protection for new moms or moms who are going to adopt a child, because right now, the member has to be in their seat unless they are given permission for a leave. If this legislation is passed, we will be giving an opportunity for young moms, as well as parents, so that they can have time off to look after their young one, especially a newborn.

The other piece of the legislation—and I heard during the debate on Bill 68 the concerns from the opposition member dealing with the whole issue of electronic meeting participation. As a former trustee with the Toronto District School Board, we already allow that. We want to make sure that everybody can participate. For a variety of reasons, we have difficulty scheduling or we have challenges in our personal lives. If this legislation is passed, we will be allowing the local municipality to allow electronic meetings, and they will be considered.

This consideration was done in consultation with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and several other municipalities that have asked the government to have electronic participation in meetings as an option for municipalities. It will also allow members of council and advisory committees to participate remotely because of weather conditions—they may not be able to drive in. A variety of reasons—you may have a sick child. At the end of the day, this is what we want: an inclusive and participatory council.

I'm going to let my colleague the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change further the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough—Agincourt. Now we'll turn the balance of time over to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: There is a climate change dimension to this piece of legislation, as you may know. It gives municipalities the ability to identify climate change as an area they can finance, that they can fund. We're authorizing them to pass climate-related bylaws, which are very important.

This has become a major issue, Mr. Speaker. Many of us are familiar with some of the challenges in Burlington.

Burlington, as you know, is not an old city, really. It's largely a new, suburban, 905 city. As members in this House may know, it has a storm sewer system set up to be built for about a 100-year flood event. Well, it has had three floods in the last three years that have exhausted the capacity of that sewer system, not because of the volume of water, largely, but because of the deluge that comes down in such a short period of time. It has cost taxpayers a huge amount of money because we've had to replace, for three years in a row, the brand new operating rooms in the brand new Burlington hospital. That's kind of outrageous, when you really think about it.

I could give examples from dozens of municipalities that are impacted by hundreds of millions and billions of dollars of costs that are being built into the costs of municipalities. This is really the first step to actually give them the resources to be able to do that.

There are burdens, Mr. Speaker, and in my days when I was mayor of the capital city of the province to the west, we were going through the counter experience of municipalities. The Minister of Infrastructure was the mayor of Ottawa at the time; I was the mayor of Winnipeg. We became quite good friends through that because I was in a city where health and social services were being uploaded to the province, and during that period of time under a previous government, the costs of health and social services, over \$2 billion worth, were being downloaded to municipalities like Ottawa. I remember then-Mayor Chiarelli and I talking about what that did to our budget. I was able to balance our budgets, as he did, and reduce taxes. He was dealing with trying to integrate provincial areas that were being managed on the provincial tax base. We have uploaded about \$2 billion worth of health and social service costs. We have put Connecting Links back on. In rural Ontario now, we are spending four to five times what previous governments did on rural infrastructure.

I remember going across the border, because I spent a lot of time in Kenora, and watching the conditions back then. Now I go and look at the highways that are twinned in that area, I look at the roads, and I look at the amount of resources that Mayor Canfield had compared—he was mayor when I was mayor of Winnipeg, and he came back later on. We have often talked about that. We don't often talk about that in this House, Mr. Speaker. We have had a 400% to 500% increase in infrastructure, for culverts and storm sewer systems, that is really unprecedented. So I have to take some of the criticisms that have come from some of the parties opposite with a bit of a grain of salt, because for most of the intervening years, between about 1970 and about 2006, infrastructure spending in Ontario dropped to the lowest amongst Canadian provinces. Under the previous government of Mr. Harris, they were spending 25% of the Canadian average of provincial spending on that—as low as \$2 billion. We are now spending \$14 billion to \$15 billion a year, Mr. Speaker, which we haven't seen since the 1960s.

This is yet another step forward in addressing many of the concerns. It's not forced amalgamation; it's actually

helping municipal councils have more discretion. It is not ignoring infrastructure; it is actually bringing climate-change-enabling bylaw power. It is not downloading health and social services; it is accepting a larger percentage. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, in addition to the kinds of things you see in this bill, we are changing the recycling system. We are uploading \$117 million from municipalities and setting higher standards for municipalities.

These are all good things and it is a sea change from what we experienced over a decade ago in this province, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to comment on the speeches on Bill 68 here. You know, municipal politics—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I pay no attention to what comes from Arthur Potts over there, so I didn't even hear it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would remind the member, who knows better, that if you're going to refer to a member in the Legislature, you refer to him by the riding. Thank you.

Please continue.

1630

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. Do I get extra time now?

Look, I served in municipal politics for a term in the late 1990s, and it was one of the most fulfilling parts of my political career, because municipal politics is that level of politics where you are closest to the people. But they expect you to be accountable there as well.

One of the changes in this bill is one that I just cannot accept, and that's that a member could electronically participate in a council meeting from a remote location. My people expected me to be at the council meeting, or, if I couldn't be there for whatever reason, then they understood that I would not be able to participate, nor would I be able to cast a vote during those proceedings.

They say that this change is supposed to help rural people, is supposed to be about rural people. I hardly think so. Rural people really do understand that when they run for political office—or if they're supporting someone for political office, they expect them to be on the job. If the weather is that bad, there's a good chance that that council meeting might be postponed, or much of the debate that would be taking place at it would be tabled for another time. We get that in rural Ontario.

This change is not something that I can support at all. I think it's just buying into some cockamamie belief that this new age deserves everything to be done electronically—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We still expect our politicians to be here—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What's next? Are you going to vote electronically for here—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I would like to remind the member that when your two minutes are up, you please sit down. You were reminded half a dozen times. Please sit down.

I might also remind the member that perhaps I have a list here, and of course—well, you're not on that list of being warned. But you know what? Just a friendly shot across the bow that it's never too late. You may sit down.

We will now move on to further questions and comments. The member from Nickel Belt, take it away.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On a point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, I had my own clock running here, so I didn't—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. That's not a point of order. You may sit down. If you stand up again and do something like that, I will warn you.

To the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I must say that I listened attentively to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt and the Minister of the Environment, and I'm thinking we did not listen to the same speeches, because it did not give me the kind of enthusiasm that the previous member just had.

Coming back to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt: Some of the ideas that she brought forward are worth talking about. The problem is that they are not really in the bill. There is a difference between what we want to happen and what we read in a bill. Unfortunately, I tend to be a reading-in-the-bill type of person when I review. I wish her luck with some of this.

It's also a trend that we see more and more, where bills that are being presented open the door to do other things yet to be defined. The problem is that when you open the door, sometimes it's hard to know exactly where that will lead. But the fundamentals that needed to be addressed with our municipalities—that is financing—are clearly not in the bill.

The other part that needed to clearly dealt with, the conflict of interest, is partly in the bill, but not for a municipality that is struggling and has had issues with conflicts of interest. They could continue to have conflicts of interest, because here again, the bill takes a step, but doesn't bring us to the end goal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you very much for this opportunity to comment on the speeches made by my good friend the Minister of the Environment and Climate

Change and my equally good friend, whom I've known a lot longer, from Scarborough–Agincourt.

I think it's so appropriate that the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change should be able to take the moment, in his expertise, to point out these very important sections of this bill that apply to climate change adaptation programs that all municipalities across Toronto must be focusing on, and that the bill provides regulatory-making authority for those municipalities to do just that: to plan for the long term, to plan for the more frequent storms that we're having and to address their stormwater management programs in a way that protects the infrastructures of their respective cities.

I find it also very important that we had the member from Scarborough–Agincourt get up and speak very clearly on matters that are within the bill, matters around an integrity commissioner, allowing and directing municipalities all across this province to create rules of conduct governing members of municipal councils.

It's so appropriate that she should be, because I've known this young lady, going back, for some 30-something years. I can't imagine a member with more integrity and a greater understanding of proper codes of conduct than we get from our member from Scarborough–Agincourt. She's an extraordinary member, working hard for her community, working hard for all people in her community at all income levels. As a nurse in her community, this is what she has done and done so well.

For her to stand up and point out those very clear sections, and particularly the importance of bringing those responsibilities that the city of Toronto has, under the City of Toronto Act, and bringing those to all municipalities under the Municipal Act—these are very important changes that are being brought forward in this bill.

I'll have a chance a little later on today to speak more about some of the issues around climate change, and some of the great work that we are seeing that municipalities can do in the area of protecting our stormwater management systems. I look forward to doing that shortly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm happy to rise again and speak on Bill 68.

I'm particularly interested—these two-minute opportunities are called “questions and comments,” so I'm going to pose a question. The question is—I like to call it the mail-it-in amendment—why do we have that in Bill 68?

The mail-it-in amendment essentially would allow individual council members to review their council package on Sunday night and then put an “S” for “support” or “O” for “opposed” on all of the proposed amendments and bylaws that would be coming forward for debate at the next council meeting.

My question is, who has asked for that? Why do we need that? There are 444 municipalities in Ontario. They

are not hours and hours and hours away. We have members sitting in this Legislature who spend 12 hours, 10 hours, eight hours on the road to get here to serve their constituents. We are not asking that of our municipal representatives. So why do we need an amendment that would allow individual council members to sit at home, not have any consultation from fellow council members and not hear any of the public deputations that happen when the public appears and speaks in support or in opposition to a particular bylaw? They wouldn't even have to show up for that, yet they still would have the privilege to vote on a bylaw. I don't get it.

I would love to have a member from the government side—because this is a government bill—explain to me why we need the mail-it-in amendment. It's ridiculous.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): For final comments, I return to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to thank the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the member from Nickel Belt, the member from Beaches–East York and the member from Dufferin–Caledon.

This whole conversation about amending the Municipal Act has been in conversation for many, many years.

I greatly appreciate the passion of the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, who spoke about climate change.

I heard the concerns the member from Dufferin–Caledon had with regard to the whole issue of the mail-it-in amendment. I hear those concerns, and I think there will be further conversation when this bill gets discharged to a committee, in terms of public hearings and what have you.

I also want to say to the member from Beaches–East York—Mr. Speaker, he and I go back many, many years as advocates in Toronto–Danforth.

I also want to say to the member from Nickel Belt: Thank you for your passion and your comments dealing with the whole issue of conflict of interest, but more importantly, for your advocacy work in Nickel Belt, because I know you're passionate about this issue. But more importantly, your suggestions are always welcome.

1640

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: What can we say, Mr. Speaker? He's a colourful member. His comments with regard to electronic participation: Given the technology era that we're in, it is critically important that we look at technology as another opportunity to access public meetings. There are people—not just members of council, but also participants, deputants—who cannot show up to meetings. We, as members here, have allowed witnesses to come before committees through electronic means. So if this happens here in the Ontario Legislature, it has to be applied across the board as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Certainly, I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments today on Bill

68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act. I think it's really interesting, as we've all had a round of debate on this bill, that there are areas that we keep coming back to because of the fact that they are things that concern us all, perhaps in a different way, but nevertheless concern us. My concerns in that regard certainly are consistent with those of my caucus colleagues.

As you know, Bill 68 affects a good number of other acts, including the Municipal Act, the City of Toronto Act, the building code, the Education Act and countless others. I want to voice my appreciation to all the municipal sector employees and organizations who took time to submit changes and to share those submissions with the PC caucus. I have found these submissions helpful in drafting my remarks, as have my caucus colleagues.

There are parts of this bill that will certainly be helpful to municipalities and their governance. I think that there are as well, though, ones that are quite concerning.

I'm pleased that this legislation looks at a number of items that municipalities requested, such as the definitions of meetings, expanding prudent investor rules to all municipalities, and moving the start date for new councils.

On the other hand, I have a concern about the government's proposal to allow municipal councillors to call in to council meetings instead of attending in person. I don't believe that this is either transparent or accountable. While I appreciate that the new technology opens doors for many people to telecommunicate and otherwise achieve a better work/life balance, I also appreciate the solemn importance and duty that elected officials have to show up at their council chambers and debate and vote on the issues in person.

I think this provides us with a clear case to be made for committee hearings for this bill, in areas of the province, to hear about how these changes will impact the municipalities, large and small, southern and northern.

There have been comments made already this afternoon with regard to the ability to call in. One was made just recently with deputants. Certainly, under certain circumstances committees have taken the work of individuals who have called in and used their time in that form of deputation. But I think we all know that it has shortcomings—even just simply the technology of whether you can hear well, whether you can understand some of the language. I usually find that when I'm on one of these calls, if the table is too long, you're not going to hear anything anyone says at the other end of the table. That obviously isn't a useful way to try to make important decisions.

So the question of the new technology is one that I think we have to take as an aid but not as a substitute. I think it's really important also, when you think about the way in which people learn more about themselves and each other, as a council or as a caucus or as an assembly, when you know them more personally than you do, sitting at the other end of a teleconference.

Obviously, there are arguments that people can participate in these meetings and they can call in from

anywhere at all, whether it's the beach or at home or anything else. It raises the question I thought of when I was looking at the essence of this part of the bill, which is, do we go in this direction or not?

It reminded me of all of the conversation in society today on the issue of distracted driving. I thought, "This is like putting that issue into a different context, but it's exactly the same." How effectively are you able to participate in a teleconference or something of that nature—a Skype—when you're doing something else at the same time? It seems to me that it's very much akin to the problems that people have with distracted driving. Obviously, there's presumably not the danger of an accident when you're involved in this, but there is, I think, a real concern about the ability to concentrate on this.

But there's a stronger argument. I look to what happens in this chamber amongst people of different parties. What becomes clear is that, when people have served on committee together, they've had the opportunity to make acquaintanceship with their own members, as well as members of the other caucuses. I think that's something that, again, is in the public interest. When people have established their personal connection with others, they're obviously able to transfer that kind of contact and that kind of respect for our fellow members.

If you take that example and put it into the artificiality of the electronic communication, then you've created a very different kind of group of people than when you put them together and they say "hi" in the hallways.

While technology is wonderful and I'm not in any way suggesting a kind of Luddite response to this, I do think that it has to be measured, that it has to be balanced, that we have the ability to use this technology, but it must not become an excuse for what we're doing and what we're trying to accomplish for the benefit of our constituents.

I also want to make some reference, in the time that I have, to what I feel is kind of a shotgun kind of response here with the question of appointment versus the election of regional chairs. As the members of the chamber would know, there have been various attempts, through the private members' process, to bring together people to agree to an elected chair. I started to make a list of the members who had made private members' bills from different times to bring this about. It never seems to come.

I have to tell you that it's not top of mind to my constituents. They never ask me about this process, which then gives me a little clue about how much they are concerned about this, which is not.

But I do want to provide a quote that gives a balance to this conversation. Today, we have York Regional Chair Wayne Emmerson. He's an appointee to the job, and he has said that he is ready to put his name on a ballot in 2018. His quote is: "It is my intention to run for regional chair in the next municipal election if the legislation passes."

1650

But I just caution people that the impetus has not come from the ground up—the citizens, the communities. I

haven't heard that. It remains to be seen just how this is going to come out in this bill and the reaction that people will have, because it seems to be split. There are several areas that have elected regional chairs and several areas that don't. They all seem to be working.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments? The member from AM: Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: There you go, Mr. Speaker. See? That's how you seed a thought into somebody's mind, that you will never forget my riding ever again. You'll always think: A to M, Algoma-Manitoulin.

Once again, it's a privilege to stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin. I was listening very intently to the member from York-Simcoe and to some of the comments that she brought forward. I just wanted to add some of the things that are missing out of this bill. One is—the biggest thing, which all municipalities were actually expecting out of this bill—new revenue tools. Some of the members had alluded to that comment a little bit earlier, where here, in the beautiful area of Toronto, they have a hotel tax for some reason. That may work for some municipalities, but it may also hinder it. But not providing them with that opportunity—giving them that choice of wanting to do that or not is something that a lot of municipalities were expecting.

Some of the things that I wanted to touch on that are not in here: how much oversight councillors will permit the integrity officer to have to look into certain issues. That's something that is somewhat concerning. Auditors general are still not allowed to initiate investigations without a council's approval. Again, we're looking at opening this up in order to create greater transparency, greater participation from community members, which is something they've been asking for for a very long time.

There have been no major changes with respect to new municipal revenue tools, as I talked about a little bit earlier. Again, that's a huge, huge part of this bill that is missing, and which people were expecting. I hear the minister when he says that that will be coming down at a later date, but we've heard that message from the minister many times before. How long is it going to take before these changes come? How long will municipalities have to wait for these changes to come to them to benefit their communities? Because it is certainly something that is missing from this bill.

So again, thank you for providing me with the time to speak to this bill, Mr. Speaker. I see that you're busy, so I'll just keep going on and talking about this bill. It's such a privilege when we stand up.

There are a few other things that are missing from this bill—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Oh, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): We'll deduct that from your account.

Further questions and comments? The member from Northumberland-Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, I'm not going to ask for equal treatment.

Let me, in my comments, focus on the electronic meeting participation a little bit. We've heard this over and over and over. One of the questions that I've heard is: "Where did this idea come from?" It's a good question. I think it's a valid question to ask. I would say that AMO requested that the government consider this in legislation. Other municipalities came forward also requesting to make it somewhat—

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, there are some props on the other side that I think you would want to pay attention to.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Are you telling the Speaker how to do his job?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: No, I'm not. I'm just making a suggestion.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, all I'm saying is, to answer and be specific, that was a request from municipalities. The government, on this side—we do respect municipal choices, municipal requests—

Mr. John Yakabuski: How about the Green Energy Act?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, if he's going to comment, must (a) be in his chair and (b): first time.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, I request additional time because that was taken away.

I would say that this government listens to municipalities. I lived through the dark days as a municipal politician when everything was downloaded to us. So—

Ms. Daiene Vernile: By their government.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: When they were in government. They were shown the way out.

So we listened to municipalities. We're enacting what the municipalities want. I can tell you that we want to go down that road, and they're going to be our partners, because that's what we believe in.

All I'm saying is that it's unfortunate that when we touch—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Name names.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, second time.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: —when we touch a bit of a sour note, they get excited. I understand that. So they should. But they should have some respect.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? The member from—

Ms. Laurie Scott: Haliburton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): —Haliburton—

Ms. Laurie Scott: Kawartha Lakes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): —Kawartha Lakes—

Ms. Laurie Scott: And Brock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): —and Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the inclusionary naming of my riding.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Set them straight. Laurie, set them straight.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The member from Northumberland would like me to set a few things straight on this side. So, Lou, just listen to what I say and you'll be all calm now—the member from Northumberland.

I want to comment on the initial remarks from the member from York–Simcoe, because I think we kind of lost track of what we were talking about in the questions and comments. We're talking about Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act. The member from York–Simcoe, who, I want to highlight again, is the longest-serving female MPP in the Legislature at almost 8,000 days—

Mr. John Yakabuski: New record today.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Every day is a new record for the member from York–Simcoe or, as we call her, Lady Munro. We seek to be as professional as, and to continue to be mentored by, the gracious member.

The member from York–Simcoe and I actually—

Interjection: Share a boundary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, we share a boundary in Durham region. Actually, my father was the member from York–Simcoe's federal member of Parliament for several years. As riding boundaries have changed, I have taken over Brock township provincially, which was once served by Lady Munro.

There are a lot of good issues that have been brought up. I remember debating, back in my early days, when the member herself had brought forward Municipal Act changes—electing the chairs versus appointing the regional chairs. We're still having that debate. There's a mixture of both that still go out there. Also, I think she gives a lot of good advice. I know that the times have changed from when she was first elected in 1995. Now we're talking about electronic voting at municipal council levels.

I just want to put a shout-out—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The member from Dufferin–Caledon is quite passionate about this.

I'm running out of time, as the Speaker says, but I just want to give a shout-out to rural municipalities: We don't all have WiFi.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to say that the member is right: I have big parts of my riding where we don't have WiFi and even bigger parts of my riding where we don't have cell service either—just to put that into perspective.

I want to come back to the main point that the municipalities want us to address; that is, municipal funding. It was rather interesting to read the work that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario has done. They looked at projected funding needs for the next 10 years.

They did that for 2015 to 2025. They found that, if municipal governments were to rely on property taxes mainly, with all else being equal, they would require an estimated 4.51% annual property tax increase for the next 10 years to fund existing programs and service levels—so you keep everything as is and you don't improve anything. They would need an extra 3.84% annual property tax increase for the same 10-year period to fund the \$60-billion infrastructure deficit. In other words, our property taxes would need to go up 8.35% year over year for the next 10 years just to provide the existing standard of service and infrastructure that we presently enjoy in our municipalities. This, if you're strong in math, means that you would be doubling your property taxes within 10 years. I want to remind everyone that Ontario already has the highest property taxes in Canada. This is something that needs to be addressed. It is a blaring, big hole in the legislation we have here: that our municipalities have funding needs that need to be addressed and that are not being addressed when we have the chance to do that.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): For final comments, we return to the member from York–Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to thank the members for Algoma–Manitoulin, Northumberland–Quinte West, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Nickel Belt for their comments this afternoon.

I think that anyone trying to draw some conclusion from the remarks that have been made by all of us this afternoon would recognize that one size does not fit all, and that the issues around some of these are of different importance to different municipalities. So while there are a set of needs in one area, they don't rank in the same way that they do in another. Whether it's infrastructure investment, technology, the lack of WiFi, the closing of schools, whatever, one size does not fit all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents of Windsor West to speak to Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, 2016. I have a lot of notes here. I thought I knew exactly what direction I was going to go, but sitting here this afternoon and listening to some of the other members do their time in debate and some of the issues that were raised—I'm going to start in a bit of a different direction and see how far into the bill I can get.

I wanted to start by addressing something that the member from Scarborough–Agincourt said. I have a great deal of respect for the member from Scarborough–Agincourt, and she wasn't entirely inaccurate in what she said about trustees and why they're not included in this bill. She explained that school board trustees already have the ability to take a maternity or a parental leave. But she didn't go on to explain that under the Education Act, a trustee actually has to have the permission of the majority of the board in order to be able to take an extended leave. Under the Education Act, they are required by law to be physically present for three meetings

a year. For anything outside of that, any extended period of time that they're going to be away, they have to have the permission of the rest of the trustees in order to do so. It's not automatic. Many boards, obviously—I would hope all boards—would approve a maternity or a parental leave. However, it is left up to the will and the whim of each individual school board as to whether or not they want to approve an extended leave.

This is where we start to see the difference between—and I think it's important to point out, because there are some people out there who don't know what the role of a school board trustee is. They don't understand how you become a school board trustee. Many believe that you are actually an employee of a school board, like the rest of the staff, but you are not. You run in a municipal election. Your name gets put on a ballot, along with the city councillors and the people running for mayor, and you are elected, just like your city councillors and your mayors. So they are municipally elected officials, just like your councillors and your mayors. Because of that, they fall under legislation. They generally fall more under the Education Act than they would the Municipal Act.

Having been a trustee for eight years and the vice-chair of a school board for a year of that, it became very clear that there are some discrepancies between the expectations of our city councillors and our mayors, and the expectations, under law, of our trustees. There are some very large gaps.

So again, although the member from Scarborough—Agincourt wasn't entirely incorrect that trustees can take a leave, it is not an automatic leave. They still have to ask somebody's permission in order to take that leave. Really, they should be covered under this legislation so that they have the same rights as city councillors have. They shouldn't have to go and rely on a board of trustees. In my case, our board was 10 trustees. You shouldn't have to rely on a majority vote to say that you have the right to spend time with your child after giving birth or after adopting. It should be automatic. You should be able to give notice, saying, "I've had a child"—or "I've adopted a child"—"and I'm going to take time off." So there is a big gap there that could have been addressed in this legislation.

The other issue that came up that I found interesting was from the member for York-Simcoe, someone whom I also respect greatly. She had talked at length about, and many members from the PC caucus had talked about, phoning in for meetings, and she had brought up the possibility of distracted driving. Well, I'm not sure if any member in this House who was calling in, whether it's for a school board meeting or council meeting, would want to spend three, four, five or more hours on the phone in their vehicle, even if they're hands-free and on a Bluetooth. I know I wouldn't. It's not the best way to communicate. I don't think anybody would want to be in their car that long phoning in for a meeting, so they likely would call in their regrets for the meeting and just not participate at all. However, I'm sure it is possible that

there are some people out there who just might phone it in and spend three or four hours in their car having that conversation.

Where my concern comes in around phoning in for meetings is that it appears as though the PC caucus is saying they don't support somebody being able to call in. One of the members had actually said that, when he was part of a city council, his constituents expected him to always physically be present at meetings.

The reality is that that is not always possible. We have, as with school boards, where you might have members who are off at conferences where they are learning about legislation, they are learning about things that affect their school boards and the learning experience for their students and how it affects the staff. We also have municipal councillors and mayors who go off to conferences. They meet with other councils and other mayors and discuss issues. Sometimes they have similar issues and sometimes they don't, but they come together at things like AMO and other gatherings where all the municipalities get together and talk.

Just because they are away at an approved conference does not mean they don't want to participate in a board meeting that is taking place. They have to have the ability to phone in from wherever that conference is and speak on behalf of the people that elected them to have a voice.

The other issue is the very real issue that as we have an aging population, more and more people are responsible for taking care of an elderly member of their house, an infirm member of their house, someone who is ill, and they may not always be able to leave that person to physically go into a board meeting. Now, as I had stated earlier, under the Education Act, school board trustees have to physically be in attendance at least three times a year. That's not up for discussion. If you miss three times a year, the trustees can then move to have you removed from your duties as a trustee.

I don't think you would find too many councillors, mayors or school board trustees who would miss more than three meetings, certainly not without consent, but there are circumstances where a member has—I had it when my children were little, when I was first elected, where my husband worked shift work and he could not get the time off. His employer would not allow him the time off. So I had to stay home with my sick child and I phoned in for the meeting. I think we have to be reasonable when we are talking about not allowing elected officials to call in to meetings on rare occasions. That has to be allowed.

We have had members in the past who have been hospitalized, sick themselves, who still—now, there's dedication. Imagine that: You're in a hospital, you're sick enough to be in hospital, and they are still phoning in to their meetings, to their council meetings or, in our case, a board meeting. So I think you will find that it is in very rare cases that you will have a municipally elected official who is going to abuse the privilege of being able to phone in for a meeting. I think that we have to look at it realistically and allow for professional judgment when it comes to phoning in.

1710

I just wanted to bring up an issue, too—because I'm almost out of time now; it's amazing how quickly 10 minutes can go—that the member from Nickel Belt had raised around the Auditor General. An Auditor General cannot look into the dealings of a city council without the council giving them the go-ahead to do so. I'm going to talk about an issue specifically in Windsor; in fact, it's one of the councillors within my riding. His ward is within my riding. When he ran for election, when Mr. Borrelli ran for election, the biggest part of his platform was saying that he would champion a municipal auditor general, so our city council would have their own auditor general who would look into the business of council.

After he was elected, he backtracked on that and said that, after a sober second thought—not implying that he was drinking when he was saying that; I just mean that after he'd had a chance to go back and think about it, maybe talk to some of the other councillors or perhaps the mayor; maybe they weren't in support of a municipal auditor general. He changed his mind and he backtracked, and that has caused a huge issue in my riding, specifically around the fact that he ran on the promise to champion a municipal auditor general and then backed down on that. In fact, he contacted myself and my colleagues from the area and suggested that somehow it was our responsibility, that we should make the provincial Auditor General now completely responsible for the business of council, looking into it. But in fact, the Auditor General cannot do that unless the council compels them to do so.

I think this is an issue that needs to be addressed municipality by municipality.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you to the member from Windsor West for talking about trustees in the school board and how important trustees are. Unfortunately, in many elections, people do not educate themselves about the people running for trustee. I hope in the future that people will realize how important this job is and will go out of their way to get to know the candidates. They make very important decisions, as we know, and I know that from my former life as a teachers' federation leader and also as a teacher.

Another area I'd like to talk about: This legislation would add a new section to the Municipal Act. Section 268 would permit a local municipality to appoint an alternate member to attend upper-tier council meetings. There are restrictions on this ability right now, and only one alternate may be appointed. This change was requested through our consultation with the municipalities. Some lower-tier municipalities only have one seat on regional council. If their representative was unable to attend, the lower tier wouldn't have any representatives at the regional level. It's important that the local perspective from lower-tier municipalities is there.

That's why, through this legislation, we are also proposing that the composition of regional councils be

reviewed after every second election. We want to ensure that the communities are fairly represented at the regional level.

Again, I urge everyone to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? The member from Dufferin-Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Sure; happy to. I want to continue on the vein that the member from Oshawa raised about electronic participation.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Windsor.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Windsor? Sorry; I don't have my goggles on.

She talked about electronic participation, Speaker. I have no issue with electronic participation; I have an issue with electronic voting.

If you actually look at it, subsection 189(4) of the act is repealed and the following substituted: "The applicable procedure bylaw may provide that a member of city council, of a local board of the city or of a committee of either of them, can participate electronically in a meeting which is open to the public to the extent and in the manner set out in the bylaw provided that any such member shall not be counted in determining whether or not a quorum of members is present at any point in time."

My issue is that there is nothing in that amendment that suggests you cannot pass a bylaw that would preclude electronic voting. It precludes quorum calls—you can't participate and be counted in a quorum—but it does not exclude or preclude the ability for electronic voting, and that is my issue. That is why I have a serious concern with that subsection.

So if you wanted to make it clear, then when you added "quorum," you should have said "quorum" and "voting," but you didn't do that. You left a big hole in this legislation that can cause big issues, and I would like that hole to be sealed before we start voting on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Windsor West—not Oshawa.

Actually, to get back to the member from Dufferin-Caledon, who has brought up a very good point: The bill is not clear in some ways on certain issues. When we talk about calling in to partake in a council meeting, we can't be counted as a quorum, but it doesn't definitely say in the bill itself that you can't vote, and that should be clarified. I'm sure the Conservative Party will make that amendment very clear when this bill gets to committee. I thank the member for clarifying her issue on that. I'm somewhat disappointed that she didn't also say, "Oh, I was wrong when I said you can mail in your conversation." We were sitting here, and we said, "What is she talking about—mailing in participation in a council meeting?" That's not in the bill. It was a turn of phrase that she was using, but it did cause some confusion. I had to go over and check with members on the opposite side—I had to check with their policy guy in the back—because there is nothing in the act that says anything

about taking part in a council meeting by mailing in, in advance, the way you want to vote when you're not going to be there. That's not in there. Although, if you read Hansard, somebody might get the impression that you could just mail in your participation. That is not in the bill.

I look forward to taking part in the clause-by-clause participation and the hearings when we get this bill to committee because I know that there are aspects of it—I know the NDP will be making numerous amendments to the bill in order to make it more clear, more fair to all, and I look forward to that.

Speaker, thank you for your time this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I find this very, very amusing because—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I find this very amusing, Mr. Speaker. The member for Caledon is very concerned about this. First of all, no one is forcing anybody to do it. This was asked for by AMO and by a number of rural municipalities that petitioned us to do it—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Name names.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Maybe you're familiar with it? The people you forced amalgamations on and downloaded \$2 billion worth of costs—you might remember them.

The second thing is—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Leeds—Grenville—thank you.

I just wanted to remind you that I am still present and still monitoring the situation before it gets too out of hand. So with your indulgence, and I would appreciate that, I will return back to the Minister of the Environment, and the clock will now start again so we can hear him. Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You're very kind, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

It's passing strange to me, Mr. Speaker, because all that's being allowed here is that municipalities can make this decision for themselves by a vote, and they can't have a quorum, which limits the number of people who can participate.

What's even stranger to me is, I believe when the leader of the official opposition was a member of Barrie council, he introduced electronic voting—I understand from the member from Barrie—into his council because he thought it was a good idea. So explain to me the logic that the party doesn't want to allow councils the choice, but has an issue with something that their leader thought was a good idea when he was a municipal councillor.

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It tells us that that same patronizing, local-prejudiced attitude, that people in Queen's Park can tell councillors how to do stuff, how to make decisions, how to manage budgets, what the size and shape of their municipalities are, downloading to them without consent—and the fact that they don't even know that AMO actually asked for this, Mr. Speaker, tells you how illiterate they are about the municipal world in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I will now return to the member from Windsor West for final comments.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. That was interesting. What we just saw was that nobody was really commenting on what I said. It turned into a sparring match between the Liberal caucus and the PC caucus. I'm not really sure who won that one. I think maybe the Liberal side did.

I'd like to thank the members from Barrie and Dufferin—Caledon, my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh, and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

The member from Barrie brought up the importance of trustees—I couldn't agree with her more—and how much she respects what trustees do. That's fantastic, but trustees don't need lip service; what they need is support from the government to actually be able to do the job that they're elected to do. That would include providing them the funding to be able to keep schools open and repair the schools, frankly.

The member from Dufferin—Caledon: I appreciate her clarifying her remarks, because what we saw from that is absurd: the fact that somebody's vote can count if they call it in, but they don't count for quorum. I'm not quite sure how that happens.

It also brings to light what I had addressed in my 10 minutes, which is the gap between the governance of school boards and the governance of municipal councils. With trustees, you can phone in, and it counts towards a quorum. You can phone in, and your vote counts.

In fact, there were many times—I shouldn't say "many." There were times when there were members from the county—I'm talking about a member who lived out in Leamington. Speaker, you know how far of a drive it can be, especially in the winter, from Leamington into downtown Windsor. If we were going to be having a discussion that was going to be on something we had already discussed and kind of decided on in another meeting and we really just needed to vote on it, it would actually cost taxpayers more for the member from Leamington to drive in and charge for his mileage than it would for him to just phone in his vote.

I think that's something the government needs to take into consideration. Clear up the discrepancy in the bill before us, and make sure that your vote actually counts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to have this opportunity to speak to this incredible bill. I'm going to be

sharing my time this time with the hard-working member from Ottawa South, who does stellar work in his community, and I'm looking forward to hearing his comments.

Interjections.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm hoping that I can actually get the attention of the House, so that they aren't shouting over me, as there are so many others today, because I want to bring a perspective to this bill that I think is very, very important.

At the outset, though, I think I would like to acknowledge and thank the excellent, hard work that was done by our member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale when he was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing at the time. These consultations started out in 2015, and the submissions that we received—over 300-400 submissions from people with ideas about how we can make the legislation and make the Municipal Act work more effectively for the people all across the province of Ontario.

Particularly, there's a bit of municipal envy going on in the province of Ontario. Municipalities right across the province are concerned that the city of Toronto has powers that they don't have. We have seen it on a whole bunch of taxation issues and regulatory-authority-making issues.

One of the great advancements we see in this piece of legislation is the ability of all municipalities—now under the Municipal Act—to have access to a lot of the same powers that the city of Toronto has had and has been using very responsibly over the years. That's a major advancement forward.

One of those areas is on regulations around planning and municipal infrastructure, particularly related to climate change. That's extraordinarily important, that we have some changes in this act focusing on the climate change issue.

As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, it is part of my role to create an adaptation policy for the province of Ontario. We're out seeking additional information from municipalities and stakeholder groups, so we can better understand the kinds of changes that we need to put in place, the authorities we need to have in place, so people can respond effectively to climate change.

Municipalities are doing some really interesting work. You may be familiar with the concept of a French drain. Now, for those of us who live in compact, dense municipal environments, storm water runoff is a serious problem. In the city of Toronto we have combined sewer/storm water. We've had significant issues on Lake Ontario water quality. We're trying to divide the sanitary and the storm water, but just the runoff from roofs is very significant. So the city of Toronto has the authority to require green roofs on tall buildings, to require people to do storm water management plans, low-income development plans on their own homes, in order to reduce. We have downspout disconnection programs, putting rain barrels in. This is really important—all the roofs in Ontario and Toronto flowing into our storm sewers.

In my own house, when I renovated, in our front yard we dug a hole about six feet deep and about eight feet—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I have the perfect use for it.

Mr. Arthur Potts: The perfect use for it? I'm sure you do, sir.

What we did was, then we filled it up with rocks and put topsoil back on top, and we have planted. It's known as a French drain; it's a rain garden. What we did is, we just took the pipes from our house and the downspouts and directed them into this hole underneath my front lawn, and now I have planted all these wonderful native flowers, pollinator-friendly flowers. The water fills up in that area and then slowly seeps out and keeps the whole area watered. So I have a maintenance-free garden in my front yard based on the rain garden, the French drain concept, and it works extremely well.

We want to give all municipalities the authority under this act, and we believe, unlike members opposite, that municipalities will exercise these new powers responsibly. And as the minister pointed out, they don't have to do these things. You know, if a municipality doesn't want to have electronic voting, they don't have to implement it. If they do—and the member seems to be concerned. The member from Lanark is concerned that it's not part of their responsibility. Well, they'll be judged on how often they use it in the next municipal election. That's the kind of responsibility you can give a municipality. The members can assume and use it as they see fit. That's important.

Now, my friend Marc Yamaguchi was my consultant on the rain garden concept. I encourage all of you in your homes to get hold of an expert like Marc. He's a landscape architect doing a master's at York in this area. Marc can assist you in planning.

I also have a good friend, a constituent, Robert Muir, who works as a storm water specialist up in Markham. He's been advising me on how so much of the flooding issues we are having isn't really as a result of climate change as much as it is about bad municipal infrastructure development. We're paving over too much, we're not directing the water in the right places, and municipalities have to have better control over that. I look forward to them doing that.

I'll turn my time over to other people now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to follow the member from Beaches–East York.

A funny story: people get us mixed up sometimes. I don't know why, but it happens. I got in the elevator about six months ago with the Leader of the Opposition. He smiled, he looked at me and he said, "How's that bar of yours doing?" I had to say, "I'm not Arthur." So I'll try not to be Arthur right now. I'm not going to talk to you about French drains, although we did learn about French drains.

I didn't know that this bill, Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, would be so exciting as it has

been here this afternoon, and it has been. It's been entertaining and exciting. But when you look at it, here's what it does.

It ensures that locally elected officials can take parental leave for 20 weeks. That's something we all expect now in this society. It's actually amazing that in the United States there's not that kind of coverage at all for parents and families.

It will also empower municipalities to address climate change locally through locally passed bylaws, and to broaden municipal investment powers, which may help finance repairs and replacement of local infrastructure. This is key, because we're giving municipalities that ability. They're a mature form of government. We know the relationship that we have with them. If you take a look at this government's record in terms of supporting municipalities, it's about \$4 billion in uploads. I know in my city, the city of Ottawa, it's upwards of \$200 million annually, which is a fair chunk off the property tax bill. We're supporting things such as the uploading of social benefit costs, the uploading of court costs, police costs, a greater contribution to public health, a greater contribution for land ambulance. This government has a very clear record of supporting municipalities, and this legislation is an extension of that.

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It will also allow more access to justice by allowing integrity commissioners to investigate complaints in the municipalities.

There has been a lot of talk with regard to electronic participation. I take it to heart that we're concerned about distracted driving, but I feel fairly confident in saying that a responsible representative of the people—

Mr. Steve Clark: Photo radar cash grab.

Mr. John Fraser: I know that you're supporting photo-enabled enforcement. I know you're going to support that, because you want to make sure school zones are safe. I know that. I can't look at anybody across that floor who won't support that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, if you'd restrict it to schools, we'd support that.

Mr. John Fraser: I know that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is going to champion that, just as he is, Speaker, your bill, which is Bill 94, cameras on school buses. Those are important things that we need to do.

Electronic voting is pretty straightforward. It's to increase participation, to ensure that—you know, we're in a new age right now. We have something more than a telephone. We have things called Skype, right? We're electronically connected to people all the way across the world. So why would you, if you had a council meeting in a town like Renfrew, drive down from Barry's Bay, or, if you're going in the other direction—

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's what I ran for. If I took the job, that's what I do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, at the end of the day, what you're looking for is that person's participation in the

meeting. If you can enable that through electronic means—I think that the balance is there in the bill.

I don't necessarily agree with the member from Windsor West. I agree with you on the pregnancy leave thing. I think that we should maybe look at that for trustees, because to have a vote of the board to support something which we all understand is a right, that we've come to understand we should all have in this society—but I can't agree on the quorum part. I think having some physical presence, so that people are available to be at the meeting, is that balance against what they're saying over here, which is that I have to drive to the meeting even if we're five feet deep in snow—or I have an ailing parent at home that I can't leave, but I can participate in the meeting.

We have the means to let people participate. They're asking for us to do this. So I can't figure out why that's such a big problem.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm still here, Speaker. You haven't even warned me at this point, I don't think.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Not yet, but give it time.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Liberals over there have been talking about how they've been listening to municipalities, and that these changes are in response to what municipalities have been asking for. The biggest opportunity for the Liberals to have listened to municipalities was when they asked for their authority to be restored that you took away under the Green Energy Act. You gave nothing back. You gave nothing back, and you know it. Ask your municipal partners that. They gave nothing back, Speaker. It was running roughshod over municipal authority. They talk about listening to municipalities. Nothing could be further from the truth. For them, it's all about politics.

We were totally opposed from day one to the road tolls in the city of Toronto—totally opposed to it. Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals—she played footsie with John Tory: “Oh, we're going to give you your road tolls.” But when the politics of road tolls said that it's not a good idea, she changed her mind and said, “No road tolls for Toronto. No road tolls for Toronto.”

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member for Beaches–East York, come to order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You didn't do what the municipality asked you to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Address the Speaker, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You did what you thought was the most politically expedient thing to do. When it comes to Liberals, it's always about politics.

What about their new so-called 25% reduction in hydro—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —a 17% reduction in hydro? Because of the mistakes they've made—the Green Energy Act and all of those turbines that are costing billions of dollars—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I wanted to remind the member on a couple of occasions, first of all, to address the Speaker when you are speaking to the bill. Secondly, I would ask that—you were to have been speaking to the bill. In my estimation, you somehow drifted quite a way from that bill.

Having said that, further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to speak to the comments made by the members from Beaches–East York and from Ottawa South—

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's bullshit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from—you will withdraw. You will withdraw.

Mr. Yakabuski left the chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is named.

Okay, we will resume. Further questions and comments? The member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Why, thank you, Speaker. I hope I get my two minutes back.

Yes, comments made by the members from Beaches–East York and from Ottawa South—and maybe some levity at this time: The member mentioned being confused with the member from Beaches–East York by the Leader of the Opposition, who thought he was the bar owner. That's understandable. When I get confused, it's with the member from Niagara Falls. I think it's a moustache thing. They'll say "Mr. Gates," or they'll say "Mr. Hatfield" to my diminutive colleague with a different colour of hair. But that's okay. No one is going to confuse—well, no, Ms. Gretzky does get confused with Ms. French. That happens. But no one confuses the member from Algoma–Manitoulin with anybody else, or the member from Nickel Belt. It's just part of what we do here.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We're unique.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We're unique, yes.

I have to say that I was disappointed that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke left under such a cloud there. I didn't hear what happened. I respect the Speaker's ruling on it. I know he's a golfer, and I know that if he was in Myrtle Beach as a municipal councillor, he would have the ability, if his municipality passed a law under this act, to call in and take part as opposed to rushing back and then going back to finish his family vacation.

I will say that it has been an interesting afternoon. I certainly know that while we're changing the act on maternity leave for municipal councillors, our member from Kitchener–Waterloo had brought it to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who said, "It's no big deal. It's not a big deal." But when the member from Kitchener Centre said, "I'm going to bring in a PMB on it," it was brought in and put into the bill. I know how it works, Speaker, and I thank you for your time this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I again have the opportunity to make some comments on the speeches from my seatmate here and the member from Ottawa.

Interjection: South.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Ottawa South.

The reality is, we hear over and over again, mostly from the opposition, that we haven't consulted on this bill, we haven't heard from municipalities. They kept on saying, "Who?" I said, "AMO."

As I said in my previous two minutes, I was a municipal councillor when we had our arms twisted. There was no consultation. As a matter of fact, the member—and I won't name that member—who was here in this seat prior to 2003 frankly acknowledged to the whole county council in Northumberland that we as municipal politicians, as mayors, knew nothing except that we were tax collectors. That's all we knew. That's the consultation that they did. So I'm annoyed when they say that we don't consult.

Then we came to power, and we started the uploading. We started an MOU table, which I'm privileged to sit at, along with Minister Mauro, at least, sometimes, once a month, to talk to AMO leaders, which represent the majority of the 444 municipalities in this province, to talk about issues that are important to municipalities and are important to the province and the people of Ontario.

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Speaker, I get aggravated sometimes when I hear that we don't talk to municipalities. I know I talk to my mayors on a regular basis. I go to their council meetings. I travel the province—and sometimes we have the minister—to meet with municipal leaders. And do you know what, Speaker? I'll be honest. Are we perfect? Probably not; is anybody ever perfect? But when they outright accuse us of not consulting, well, I think they need to rethink.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I think we can point fingers at every government. The member opposite talked about when he was a municipal councillor. When I was a municipal councillor, I actually was president of AMO for a year. The year I was president of AMO, David Peterson was in government and decided unilaterally to cancel unconditional grants. Did the membership of AMO agree with everything the AMO board did? No.

In fact, at the time, AMO had a bylaw that allowed members to petition their own association to have an emergency meeting. In fact, that's exactly what happened that year. That year, the membership of AMO, mostly from northern Ontario, petitioned AMO because they didn't agree with that unilateral 0% increase for unconditional grants, and they actually had an emergency meeting. Do you know what happened? The government decided they would have a meeting about consultation. And even though they didn't give them back their 1%, they had a lot of meetings about how better to consult municipalities.

Every ex-municipal politician, I suggest, with all due respect, has a story about the government of the day, no matter what political stripe. In the nine years that I was involved in municipal politics, I dealt with every flavour. All three flavours had their turn at government. I had times—you can check the newspaper—that I took shots at them all, because you're never satisfied, right? The issue, because of municipalities—and I'm sure AMO will tell you that not all 444 municipalities agree with Bill 68, just like when I was president of AMO, all 839 municipalities didn't agree all the time with the government of Ontario.

There are certain things that I disagree with in this bill. When I was elected, I knew the rules of engagement: Every second and fourth Tuesday in the Brockville city council chambers, be there and represent the people. I don't agree with electronic voting. I knew the rules of engagement, and those were the rules that I accepted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Ottawa South for final comments.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, Northumberland–Quinte West, whom people don't get me confused with, and Leeds–Grenville.

I do want to say to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh that sometimes people mix me up with the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Yes, it's kind of a funny thing. It happens every once in a while. I feel badly for him. But I would feel really honoured if I were mistaken for the member from Niagara Falls. So you should feel good about that.

I do want to respond to the member from Northumberland–Quinte West. We do get accused of going far back, but I think you're going back 30 years, right? That's about three decades. And I take your point. Governments of all stripes make decisions. But I know that the minister has consulted on this bill, and the measures that are in this bill—all of the ones that we're talking about—are not prescriptive. It's not prescriptive. They're optional. They're permissive; that's the proper word to use.

I understand and respect his opposition to electronic voting. That's the way that things were. We can always stick with the way that things were because that worked when "were" was. But, again, I can't see for the life of me why we would want to restrict the participation of an elected official in a meeting if we were able to provide that opportunity and if for some reason, some family reason, some weather-related reason, they were unable to be there. I just think that that's wrong-headed, and that there are provisions in the bill to create balance when we look at quorum and the ability of members to call in, and the openness of meetings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I rise now to say a few words in opposition to Bill 68.

First, some positive comments: We appreciate all the municipal sector employees and organizations who took

the time to submit changes and to share those submissions with the PC caucus. We are pleased that this legislation looks at definitions of meetings, expanding prudent investor rules to all municipalities, and moving the start date for new councils. Municipalities were generally concerned about these matters. We look forward to hearing from stakeholders on whether the proposed changes actually address their concerns.

Nevertheless, I'm going to speak in opposition to this bill. We have concerns about the government's proposal to allow municipal councillors to call into council meetings instead of attending in person. This is neither transparent nor accountable. We need to have committee meetings in multiple areas of the province to hear from municipalities large and small, southern and northern, about what effect these changes will have on them.

On the same day that the Minister of Municipal Affairs introduced this bill, the Minister of Finance introduced Bill 70, which required direct election of regional chairs, and actually amends the exact same sections of the Municipal Act as Bill 68. So if Bill 68 passed first, then Bill 70 would have to repeal those changes.

Last spring, on June 7, the Legislature passed Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, which dealt with municipal elections, including donations to candidates and third-party advertisers. Just five months later, they have introduced Bill 68, which dramatically increases those contributions from \$750 to \$1,200.

The Liberals are now increasing the amount that a candidate can contribute to his own campaign to \$25,000, despite testimony at committee last spring that this type of change would create an uneven playing field and make it easier for the very rich to get elected. It's obvious that the Liberals waited to make these changes when they thought no one was paying attention.

The PC caucus shares all the concerns which I have just mentioned, but there are other elements of the bill that worry me. I would like to draw the attention of the House to some other important concerns which compel me to object to the bill. Section 97.1 of the bill allows municipalities to pass bylaws concerning the protection of the environment. Now, we're all in favour of protecting the environment, but I have many serious doubts as to whether the bill will actually do this.

This piece of legislation allows municipalities to force people to build so called "green roofs." What is a green roof? It is "a roof surface that supports the growth of vegetation over a substantial portion of its area for the purpose of water conservation or energy conservation." Forcing people to install green roofs is a terrible idea.

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First of all, it is a gross infringement of a person's right to private property. Right now, we are debating this bill in downtown Toronto. I wonder how the inhabitants of Forest Hill or Lawrence Park or Cabbagetown or Rosedale would feel if they were compelled to transform their roofs into miniature forests. I think most people would rightly object.

Second, green roofs are ridiculously expensive to install and they require constant upkeep, which most

people would not be able to afford. The installation alone can be at least double the cost of an ordinary roof.

Third, green roofs are dangerous. They are heavy and put such strain on the structure of a house that they can collapse. This would be especially bad in areas of Ontario that get heavy snowfall. My objection here isn't theoretical. It's real. About a year ago, the green roof of a sports centre in Hong Kong collapsed because of the weight of the sod and plants on top of it. This led to the widespread abandonment of green roofs in Hong Kong and surrounding regions.

Green roofs also attract insects and vermin, which can make their way into a house and torment the inhabitants.

Fourth, green roofs can harm the environment. According to a 2015 study in the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, the water retention, drainage and substrate layers involved in green roofs had negative environmental impacts. The manufacture and installation of green roofs produce a large amount of carbon dioxide, and this is much larger than the equivalent emissions associated with conventional roofs. I encourage everyone here to look into the scientific study which I have just mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, we all want to avoid abusing or destroying the environment, but let's be serious and listen to the advice of experts. Green roofs don't help the environment, and actually hurt people.

Finally, the bill proposes to augment the existing regime of administrative monetary penalties, known as AMPs. Municipalities are already empowered to levy these penalties if a person violates a municipal bylaw. But if this bill becomes law, if a person cannot pay or refuses to pay, the municipality can attach an AMP to a person's property taxes.

Even worse, the bill provides no process of appeal. This is very much out of step with our common-law tradition. If we cannot appeal decisions and argue them out in court, how will we determine how the law is meant to be understood and enforced?

Mr. Speaker, these are my main reasons, and I urge every member of this House to oppose Bill 68.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

SKILLS TRAINING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer to a question given on March 9, 2017, by the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

To the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker.

What's clear is that we have a growing skills mismatch and need to graduate students for the jobs of today and tomorrow, not the jobs that existed 20 years ago. Key skills, like industrial arts, financial literacy and enhanced computer skills, are underfunded and, in some cases, non-existent in our schools. Ontario needs a sustained, concerted effort by employers, students, educators and government to ensure world-leading employment-focused education for a world-leading economy. The skills mismatch is too important to be addressed on a casual basis.

Addressing the skills mismatch should be one of the government's highest priorities. The advanced skills needed by employers are key to more and better jobs and improved economic growth. The skills mismatch—the gulf between the skills and credentials held by many job seekers and the qualifications looked for by employers—is a serious obstacle for people who are unemployed or underemployed, particularly our young people. Many of the good jobs that are available can't be filled because the people seeking work don't have the right education and skills. If Ontario is to have any serious hope of creating good job opportunities for young people, we must focus on the skills mismatch.

The mismatch is also a serious problem for the province's overall economy. As a report from the Conference Board of Canada has confirmed, the skills mismatch is costing Ontario billions of dollars each year, Speaker—billions of dollars per year. That report, called *The Cost of Ontario's Skills Gap*, surveyed more than 1,500 employers and analyzed the true economic impact of the mismatch. It's one of the most comprehensive reports of this kind that has ever been done in Ontario.

The report's findings are startling. The conference board says that Ontario is losing as much as \$24.3 billion in economic activity and \$3.7 billion in provincial tax revenues each year because employers can't find people with the right skills.

As the conference board noted, skill gaps are projected to become worse without action to address the issue, as three quarters of Ontario employers expect to upgrade skill requirements over the next decade. While Ontarians are among the most highly educated, the conference board says that Ontario students' educations are misaligned with the labour market. The report makes it clear that the skills mismatch affects a wide range of sectors, from engineering, health care and the physical sciences to mining, manufacturing and accounting.

Ontario needs an aggressive strategy to close the skills mismatch. We must produce a more innovative workforce in efficient and cost-effective ways. We should look carefully at the example of countries, such as Switzerland and Germany, which do a better job matching their educational programs with the requirement of employers. We must also do more to promote and value the career opportunities in the private sector, which is where most of the job growth will occur in the years ahead.

Ontario must take proactive steps to encourage more people to pursue higher education and training after high school, including apprenticeship and skills training. As well, greater numbers of post-secondary students need access to career-focused programs as part of their education. A coordinated effort will be needed to ensure that businesses, governments and educators have clearly defined goals and are collaborating effectively to meet these targets.

The skills mismatch is a serious threat to our economy today and over the longer term, and it's essential that we close that gap. Without a more highly skilled workforce, the labour shortage that is hurting many industries will only get worse. It's time to make higher education a priority in Ontario. We must ensure students continue to have access to quality programs that prepare them for rewarding careers and long-term success.

As the late American president John F. Kennedy said, "Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone"—everyone, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Whitby—Oshawa. Now I turn my attention to the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development for a response.

1800

Mr. Han Dong: I'm very pleased to respond to my colleague the member from Whitby—Oshawa.

Our government realizes that in order for Ontario to succeed and prosper in the fast-paced global economy, we need to build a strong, highly skilled workforce that can meet not only the jobs of today but also the jobs of the future. Our people are our number one strength and competitive advantage. Ontario leads in growth and innovation because of our talented, hard-working people. That's why the Premier convened the Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel. And that is why the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development is moving ahead with recommendations to strengthen the relationship between education, training and business, and working with her cabinet colleagues to:

- increase experiential learning opportunities for both secondary and post-secondary students;
- encourage post-secondary employer partnerships and strengthen adult learning opportunities;
- better inform students about different career path options;
- support workplace training; and
- provide better labour market information so Ontarians can make informed decisions on their career paths.

We're working hard in order for the goals of this strategy to become a reality. In September 2016, MAESD established a new Highly Skilled Workforce Division to provide leadership and strategic direction and cross-government coordination for the strategy.

Just on January 24, the Premier, Minister Duguid and Minister Matthews announced a \$20-million investment in the Colleges Applied Research and Development Fund, which will allow students to gain hands-on work experience in their field.

Also, we're working with agencies, businesses, labour and local communities throughout the province. For example, the communities along the Eglinton Crosstown light rail transit corridor are receiving the necessary jobs in construction as a part of the largest transit project in Canada. The agreement sets a target that 10% of all trade and crafting hours needed for the project will be performed by apprentices and journeypersons from traditionally disadvantaged groups, including indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, racial minorities and LGBTQ people. Last year, we signed an agreement to give people with employment barriers along the route of the Crosstown the skills training they need to get good jobs in construction. They will be hired as apprentices and journeypersons to help build this major transit line, which will serve their own neighbourhoods and give them a foundation of skills to take forward in their careers.

These are just a few examples of what our government is doing to ensure that young people get the skills they need to transition into the kind of good jobs we want for ourselves and for our children.

We know that younger Ontarians in particular have an incredible diversity of talents and skills but are entering a tough job market and facing higher unemployment rates than some past generations, and we are prepared to help them to achieve their goals. So we are taking action and making targeted investments to help young people looking for work.

We have provided a major reinvestment of \$250 million over two years in our youth jobs strategy to support youth employment programs in the province. Since 2013, our youth jobs strategy programs have reached over 326,000 youth, and youth employment programs have trained over 4,700 youth to address skills gaps and other barriers to work. They have also provided mentorship and training to 6,100 young entrepreneurs who created over 2,100 businesses and 2,870 jobs.

Speaker, I am confident that our government's initiatives will help young Ontarians in our province and help them to achieve their career goals.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank both members for their contribution to debate.

HYDRO RATES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Nepean—Carleton has given notice of dissatisfaction to an answer given in question period today by the Minister of Energy. The member from Nepean—Carleton has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister has up to five minutes to reply.

I turn it over to the member for Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you to the Minister of Energy for being here this evening. As I understand it, in

my 11 years in this place, it's not often that a minister takes the time to debate with a member of the opposition; it's usually their parliamentary secretary. So I do appreciate your attendance here today.

I normally don't take advantage of the late show, Speaker, because I understand that in question period I'm not always going to get the answer I want. In fact, sometimes I don't get an answer at all. But what I wanted to do was have five minutes tonight to talk about the plight of the Ontario farmer; to talk about the plight of my friend Bob Mitchell, who owns SunTech Greenhouses and is suffering; to talk about my friend Fernando Medeiros, who owns Carleton Mushrooms and is suffering; and my friend Dwight Foster, who owns North Gower grain elevators, the largest grain operation in eastern Ontario, and is suffering. There's a lot of burden placed on our farmers in this province, but the high cost of energy is crippling them. And I'm going to add this: It's not only becoming an issue with making a profit, it's not only an issue of keeping the lights on and the motors running, it's not just about ensuring that they're able to continue to employ people; it is affecting their stress, it is affecting their anxiety, it is affecting their ability to do their job and do it well, and it is affecting our food security in the province of Ontario.

I want to thank the minister for coming over to me before we spoke here in this assembly to talk a little bit about these particular cases. He has indicated to me that he will work on these individual cases. But it's really important to understand that the people who are providing agri-food in Ontario do not feel that the government is with them. They have dealt with the neonics ban. They have dealt with the HST. They have dealt with the green energy tax. They are dealing with high costs of natural gas if they want to expand their operations and it's not available. They have to deal with cap-and-trade. They have to deal with the pesticide ban. All of this has accumulated over the past decade, incrementally making it more difficult for them to adjust and to produce.

In the case of Bob Mitchell, who owns SunTech Greenhouses—and he produces what they call the little miracles of Manotick, his trademark tomatoes. I went to visit Bob last week, and he was very emotional about the state of farming in the province—a farm that he wanted to pass down to his son, who thinks, “Maybe I'm not going to do this anymore.” He told me that his product could sit side by side with a Mexican product and his made-in-Ontario, made-in-Ottawa product is 30% higher in cost, mostly due to energy prices.

This is no surprise to you, Speaker, from Leamington, of course, where the same issue is occurring. Just last week, one of the farmers in your area said, “Look, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy said it's due to humidity in Ontario that we pay higher prices and we're moving down south.” But that farmer said, “No, it's the high cost of energy. There must be a mistake.”

So all I wanted to do today is—I don't think the minister is going to change his view on cap-and-trade, the Green Energy Act or his energy policy—I wanted to

use this microphone and my place in this assembly to stand up for Bob Mitchell, to stand up for Fernando, to stand up for Dwight and all of the other farmers in Nepean–Carleton and the rest of Ottawa who feel like the government has let them down.

1810

Bob had two asks. He said, in terms of cap-and-trade, “Phase it in over a longer term,” and second of all, “Do what they do in the western provinces and provide me with a rebate, just so I can get on my feet again.”

He couldn't run his lights this past winter because of the exorbitant costs of hydro, which was a competitive disadvantage for him.

Bob, I'm here for you; I'll always be here for you. Even when the riding splits and I don't represent Carleton anymore, I want Bob and Fernando and Dwight to know this, Speaker: I will always be there for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now will direct my attention to the Minister of Energy. You have up to five minutes, sir, to respond.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It is my pleasure to be able to be here this evening and, of course, to debate with my honourable colleague from Nepean–Carleton, who, I do have to say, while we are on different sides of the House and have different political opinions, I do have a lot of respect for, and I appreciate her input into many important subjects.

One that she brought up this morning, and one that I think is important to many of us that are here in the House this evening, of course, is our agriculture business in this province and our greenhouse growers. Responding to the member this morning, I talked about some of the successes that we have in the greenhouse growers sector, and while there are successes, there is no question that there are also challenges in this sector. But we're working towards solving this. We're dedicated, together with industry leaders, to finding solutions.

This morning, I spoke about Greenhill Produce, a veteran greenhouse operator in, I'll say, the great riding of Chatham-Kent. It's good news to hear that this organization is planning to invest as much as \$100 million in an expanded site and will employ up to 300 new workers. That's just one example of the exciting work taking place in Ontario's greenhouse sector.

Industry experts have also said that the industry is growing by 150 acres per year and now has nearly 3,000 acres in the province. That again is good news, Mr. Speaker. But as the honourable member mentioned earlier, not everyone is seeing that success, and that's why I think it is incumbent upon me as minister to reach out to the honourable member and find out ways that we can have a conversation with those businesses that she's mentioning, to see if there are programs that will help these organizations.

Energy is a very, very important input for greenhouses. I think both you and I, and the honourable member and our government and the House know that, Mr. Speaker.

Competitiveness is an important factor that we constantly remind ourselves about, and that's why we brought forward a variety of those programs that we've put in place to actually help this sector and this industry and many other industries. Last fall, for example, we announced the expansion of the ICI program, moving that threshold for participation from three megawatts to one megawatt. We set this threshold with greenhouses specifically in mind, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note, because many will now be eligible for this program.

As members of this House know, the ICI program saves participants that can fully participate up to one third off their bills, which is significant.

The industrial electricity initiative, or what we call the IEI program, is another program that's benefiting greenhouses in this province. The program is designed to reward new investment in the province and it offers some of the lowest electricity rates in North America.

The most recent stream of the program included a number of greenhouse companies, including Roelands Plant Farm, Tweed Inc. and Amco Farms, just to mention three.

We know that electricity isn't the only energy input that is important to these three businesses that I mentioned and to many other greenhouse growers. Access to natural gas is very important for greenhouse growers as well. So we've recently announced a \$100-million grant program to expand access to natural gas programs right across the province. Part of this grant will be targeted to

economic development, responding directly to concerns we've heard from the greenhouse growers and their industry. We're taking action on energy costs for this sector, and we'll continue to develop programs to help.

It's worth noting that our government is supporting greenhouses in other ways. We're going to continue to work with the greenhouse sector, to help it be sustainable and competitive, through supporting research and program delivery; committing more than \$10.7 million to 440 projects in the greenhouse industry since 2013 through programs such as Growing Forward 2; and an additional \$6 million that is now available through Growing Forward 2 to assist producers in adopting on-farm innovation and improvement projects.

I know I'm running out of time. I know there are many other opportunities here to talk about, like research on lighting to help greenhouse vegetable growers make smart investment decisions.

I know this is an important sector not only to the member from Nepean–Carleton but to many others in this House. We are offering programs, and I look forward to continuing to work with the sector.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank both members for their contributions as well.

There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to have been carried.

This House now stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1816.

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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
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Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
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Lorne Coe, Vic Dhillon
John Fraser, Amrit Mangat
Gila Martow, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch